
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

THE IDEALS OF HINDUISM



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CHAPTER I.

THE CRISIS

India is facing a very critical period in her history. She is breaking off from her old moorings and is hurriedly venturing on new and uncharted seas, whilst the ancient landmarks are vanishing as even before our eyes.

The country is striving for democracy. The ideal of the Raja or the ruler—hitherto held as God on earth,—the paternal care-taker,—has lost its hold, whilst government of the people by the people is the new shining goal inviting people to seek growth by common counsel than under the direction of the time-honoured hereditary leaders. In industries too, the old handicrafts are dying out under the competition of machinery; the car is replacing the carriage and pair. Trade is faced by unions and strikes and in return replies with combines and lock-outs. The craving for luxury, expenditure and enjoyment is increasing; brand new theories with new values are replacing the old staid formulas.

More than anything else the internal condition of the people is changing. Barriers of caste are disappearing, Brahmins are losing their age-long reverence, the lower castes are claiming that they are equal to, even better than, the higher castes. Hinduism, the most exclusive of faiths, is eagerly trying to convert others into its fold, inter-marriages are growing apace, *ahimsa* is often being replaced by bombs,—and curiously the people do not see anything incongruous in it. The sacredness of Brahmins, the worship of idols, the reverence for pilgrimages, are vanishing. Things which seemed to stand firm as a mountain even to the other day are disappearing as under a wizard's wand.

But apparently all is not well with these ventures. Political experiments were tried and failed; the men were not prepared for them. Manufactures, industries and trades, are also not faring well; honest men are not available. It is always the want of good human material.

The workers themselves are not confident or easy as to how it will all end. There is often heard the plaintive cry from the Gita praying for Krishna to be reborn, as India is in sore straits ; men hoping more from magic, from outside gifts, from forcing others to contribute, than from self-growth and personal acquisition.

The unmoving East is moving, gaining momentum and accumulations at every step. But will it be an avalanche to bring chaos and ruin, even worse than that of present Russia, as its result, or will it result in the gushing forth of fresh streams to bring fertility and prosperity ? The result will depend almost wholly on the people themselves and not on external help. If the material is sound and strong then a firm noble edifice can be raised, but if the material itself is faulty then no architectural designs, or the labour of masons, would make of it a lasting structure. If the people are courageous, truthful, self-sacrificing, only then will a noble nation arise from them, for a castle of sand can have no long life.

Would India be able to rise to her opportunities ? Other empires rose and flourished, but disappeared owing to the essential weakness of the people. Egypt, Rome, Greece came to greatness, and are now memories. Portugal and Spain were world powers, but are now of little account. They disappeared because, as Kipling says it, "their people were not fit". Russia has gone back to comparative primitiveness. All these people depended on systems of external control,—when the systems failed the whole structure collapsed. France after the War of 1870, the Southern United States after their Civil War, and Germany after the Great War are not weaker for their reverses ; the people themselves must have had some reserves of strength to keep on growing. The supreme question for India is whether all these external appendages—political constitutions, trade and industrial revivals, increase of schools and book-learning, accumulation of wealth and property,—are the chief things for a nation's growth.

Nations as men do not rise to greatness except by real worth of character. Character comes by holding certain definite beliefs clearly and firmly, and then by following them in daily life despite consequences and in sticking to them in face of obloquy and of even persecutions.

Every one makes good resolutions, as at the burning ghat, श्मशान बुद्धि, or can deliver high-sounding noble speeches and promises, but the test comes in putting them to action. A man's character is not mere speech, it has like good metal to stand the strain of inconvenience, temptation and loss. The natural instincts of self-acquisition, self-enjoyment and self-protection are subordinated by a man of character to a higher call. England is but a dot on the world's map and yet has painted a very large portion of the map red ; it is not due to their political methods, or that her people are specially brave ; it is due to something in the character of the people. Afghanistan is unsubdued to-day ; Udaipore remained unbowing to Muslim supremacy ; Sikhs and Maharattas were just ordinary people ; these all possessed a definite belief and ideal, and in following them rose to greatnes.

The miser has character, but of a low type as his aim is personal gain. Much higher are persons who strive for their clan or country, the empire or the nation, in the advance of which they benefit indirectly. Highest of all are those who sacrifice themselves for a truth or a principle, and they are the great martyrs and prophets, from which they gain nothing, even remotely, except that truth and right shall prevail :- Buddha leaving his kingdom, Christ and Socrates giving their lives, and Krishna suffering the holocaust of the Mahabharata.

Character is based on a man's inmost beliefs, whether he acknowledges them or even consciously knows them or not, and these beliefs are in reality his religion ; this influences the character and elevates the whole life. Religion is the ideal which a man follows, (and if a definite clear ideal so much the better), and which has the attraction for him as the supreme good ; it permeates his life and activities and impels him, even if unconsciously, to strive for it. Religion gives a truer value to life ; it affirms that human life is but the beginning of a vaster life to come after death but which would depend on the way the present life is led, just as our tomorrows are the results of actions done to-day.

Religion is bound with the deepest springs of human action and a change of religion effects a marvellous change not only in beliefs but in the character, deportment, life and even the facial expression of the

convert. The constant presence of a new high ideal moulds the emotions and thoughts, and transforms even weaklings into heroes and martyrs. Christianity began as the creed of fishermen and manual labourers, but the belief that they were followers of a divine personality produced from amongst them men who helped to make it a world religion. Islam transformed, within one generation, poor, superstitious inhabitants of the desert into invincible conquerors and within a century extended its conquest over Asia, Europe and Africa. Conversion to Islam or Christianity rapidly changes even the appearance of the convert and makes another man of him. The poor Punjabi peasant became a Singh (lion) as soon as he took the Pahul and became a Sikh, and has made the Sikh quite a distinct type of Indian. The Akali is a much later type and is getting remarkable characteristics.

The way to raise India, to make it a great and noble nation, to bring success to all the other efforts, is to start from the inside, to raise the character of the people and that can be done only by raising high the ideals or to infuse a higher standard in its religion. But 'religion lies in doing and not dreaming'. A high ideal must be set clearly before the people and then followed.

It is not that a spirit of self-sacrifice is wanting in the people ; the heart of the people is not dead. The tens of thousands ready to court imprisonment in following the non-co-operation programme, the increasing band of youths flinging away their lives and prospects in anarchist activities and the new feeling of a devotion to the country, shows that there is ample life in the country. But where will it all lead to—to serene gleaming heights of noble up-buildings, or the miasmic swamp of destruction. It would all depend on the worth of the ideal and the goal to which it would lead.

*.............. .. . . Before social or political ideals India requires a religious upheaval In India it will be a failure to get secular knowledge without first getting religion (Swami Vivekananda —Lectures from Colombo to Almora p 123)

The highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread have been for religious ideals, (Varieties of Religious Experience, by W James p 259)

Rabindranath (Tagore) feels that a religious revival will uplift India from her present decadence (The Philosophy of R N Tagore, by S Radha Krishnan, p 231)

"Fundamentally rejuvėnation never ensues in the form of reversion to the primitive as such, but through the infusion of a new meaning which vitalises the old phenomenon ......It is precisely the religious side of life which when it embodies deeper understanding, can experience a tremendous regeneration For that which constitutes religion is the ultimate meaning of life" (The World in the Making, by Count Keyserling pp. 235 and 238).

CHAPTER II.

THE GROWTH OF HINDUISM

The entire life of the Hindus and their activities are said to be governed by their religion. If we improve their religion, if we raise their ideals, give them higher goals to achieve, then will, of a certainty, Hinduism rise and India come to her true greatness. It is not only the truest and quickest way, it is the line of least resistance as well.

But Hinduism of to-day is not the same as the Hinduism of the past ages, there have been continual backslidings and movements of reform. The Rig-Vedic religion was the worship of numerous gods and the prayer was for worldly wealth and for attaining heaven after death. The early Aryans were a conquering people penetrating into India; their chief interest was to gain victory over Dasyu hordes, to conquer in intertribal quarrels and to make a comfortable living. There was some philosophic speculation but not much of it. Later on when priests grew in power, and the pure worship began to deteriorate, a reforming and consolidating movement started. All the available genuine old traditions and hymns were collected into the Vedas, and they were counted and classified with extreme minuteness to avoid future interpollations. This period was called Sruti period. Along with this a reforming movement took its birth which called the Vedas the lower knowledge and tried to find the basic truth 'which being known all else is known', as the higher knowledge and these speculations are embodied in the Upanishads. But superstition and priest-craft proved too powerful. Sacrifices and rituals grew apace; men were told they could become gods, even become Indra in the present living body, if they could perform sacrifices and penances correctly. Sacrifices grew in length, complexity and minuteness, when even the right length of sticks to be laid at the altar, their position and angles, became of supreme importance, and the slightest deviation robbed the entire sacrifice of its effect. The recitation of the original Mahabharata began at the

Kulapati Yajna which had been going on for twelve years and there were numerous other sacrifices at which thousands of animals were killed and hundreds of priests were constantly engaged. Krishna tried to purify Hindu religion, to abolish the worship of Indra and the numerous gods, and to re-establish the worship of the One Supreme God. But the cataclysm of Mahabharata came on. The leaven however continued to work. In the sixth century B. C., Mahavira and Buddha started another movement against the priests and the gods.

Buddhism and Jainism were a revolt from inside the Hindu fold against the power of priests and the growth of superstition. As a protest against inordinate sacrifices, prolonged rituals, immoralities and the love of luxury, they went, as such revolts always do, to extremes in their tenets of taking no life whatsoever, in celebacy and monasticism. People were getting disgusted with the practices of the orthodox faith and the new teachings began to gain a large following. Buddhism became a vivifying force; Buddhists held large councils, and collected the scatterred writings of Buddha organising them into a philosophy and a religion. Hinduism had at last to wake up, and with characteristic thoroughness overhauled its beliefs and started what was nearly a new religion on reformed social basis. Hereafter was commenced, as a parallel to the Buddhist movement, a new and wonderful period of research, consolidation and creation which lasted till about 100 B. C. The art of writing which had been unknown in Rig Vedic days had now been discovered. The teachings of Buddha were in the language of the people, and the Hindus created a new scientifically arranged and phonetic alphabet in Sanskrit at the time. The new reformers retained as their basis the Vedas uncorrupted and intact, but beyond them everything else was systematised and altered. The older names were retained so far as practicable, but with new connotations and on a methodical basis. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bhagwad Gita were constructed, out of old existing materials, as they now exist. The earlier Sutras were written during this time, and foundations were laid on which later on the Dharma Shastras and the six philosophies were elaborated. The old theories about re-incarnation and Karma (which Buddha accepts in the main) were systematised along with the other

theories about creation, etc. As a reply to the Buddhist myths about the previous births of Buddha, the stories of the avatars were invented in which the old stories of Brahma and Prajapati taking the shape of fish, tortoise and boar were transferred to Vishnu. To match the worship of Buddha, the ascetic, as personal god, the story of Krishna, the god of love, was made out. It was in this time that the school of Bhakti came into prominence.

The Rig Vedic gods and customs were prevalent up to the time of the Mahabharata; the worship of Indra must have been very popular as prominence is given to Krishna's fight against Indra. Long sacrifices with the slaughter of thousands of animals were common, heavy drinking was a part of religious festivals, gambling was considered one of the knightly accomplishments, marriage between blood relatives and disregard af legitimacy and laxity in sexual relations (possibly even polyandry) were permitted. All these must have been prominent at the time to start Buddha's great revolution. The new Hinduism did away with all these evil customs and brought itself on to a level with Buddhism in its moral and social reforms.

To complete the good work they abolished the old gods. It is very significant that the Vedas were preserved, but the Rig Vedic gods in whose honour the hymns were composed should have disappeared in a very short time, soon after Buddha's death, whilst the newer hierarchy of gods made at that time two thousand years ago should have persisted to this day. This new movement kept the old names in many cases but gave them new values. Indra a very powerful Rig Vedic god is now only a minor deity; Soma, the god of drink, whose greatness is celebrated in a whole book of the Rig Veda; Dyaus Pitar, the great god of heavens, Varuna, the guardian of righteousness, are almost unknown. On the other hand Siva, a subordinate to minor Rudra, and Vishnu a small god, have been made supreme. Brahma's duties have been changed, and though a major god is not worshipped. In Rig Veda the characteristics of all the gods are not clearly defined, they are mixed up

... There is even a hymn in the Rig Veda on the gambler, men gambled with their wives and children at home

and undifferentiated. In Rig Veda (viii-30) it is said "Among you gods there is none that is small, none that is young, you are all great indeed". But they are now in a regular hierarchy. Bipin Chandra Pal says in his 'The Soul of India' (p. 27), that none of the present gods are Vedic gods, but Puranic, though they bear Vedic names. The whole series of gods and their functions as they now exist are so graded that they must have been deliberately made so, on some clear thought out scheme. '

Stone buildings and idols were made for the first time in these centuries. The whole country was pulsating with a new life which culminated in Asoka's reign about 250 B. C., the most humane king in history. He was the product of his time and could not have been so great had not his subjects been inspired by similar ideals. Megasthenes who had visited India just before Asoka's reign writes in superlative terms of the truthfulness and morality of the Indians. Buddhism at this time was not a distinct faith, but only a part of Hinduism; Asoka styles himself as the 'Beloved of the Gods'. Brahmins, Kshatriyas became Buddhists without getting out of the Hindu fold. The teachings of Krishna, Mahavira and Buddha had purified Hinduism and breathed a loftier life into it. This was the time of the country's highest greatness; India was truly then *Sur archita Bharata* (India beloved of the gods).

But it was too good to continue. With a growth of otherw-orldliness the power of the priests increased; men became recluses and religion

'.. ....Tilak following Bhandarkar and Telang accepts the date of the present version of the Gita at 300 B C as of the Mahabharata, as well, of which Gita forms a part In Tilak's opinion there must have been an earlier edition of the Gita made at about 900 B C. He refers to Dr Bhandarkar who places Patanjali at about 250 B C whilst Panini must have been earlier (Tilak's Gita Rahasya, Hindi ed pp 555 to 558, 563, 564, 329) (Bhandarkar, Vaishnavism Ch I) C C Vaidya (The Mahabharata p 21) gives the date of the present version of the Mahabharata from 300 to 100 B C Radha Krishnan (Ind Philosophy Vol I Ch IV) gives 500 B C onwards for the theistic reconstruction of the Gita and the later Upanishads The six systems of Philosophy were begun about 300 B C to 200 A D E W Hopkins places both the Mahabharata and the Ramayana from the fourth to the second century B C He says that with the worship of images of Buddha and respect for his relics under stupas, idol worship was started after Buddhism (Article in Cambridge History of India pp 258, 259 The Great Epic of India p 398 The Religions of India p 557, all by E W Hopkins) A A Macdonnell says that Manusmriti was written between 200 B C. and 200 A D but the older parts of Mahabharata are much older than it. The earlier Sutras go back to the time of the rising of Buddhism The reign of Asoka was the starting point of Indian art and stone began first to be used in structural monuments, the earliest were stupas enclosing the relics of Buddha Idols were not heard of till 300 to 200 B C in the Sutra period He thinks the Mahabharata must have been written about 500 B C and the Ramayan about 550 to 200 B C The arrangement and classification of Sanskrit alphabet was introduced about 4th—5th century B C Probably Buddhism gave rise to the impulse to the composition of systematic manuals of Brahminic books and also of Sutras (India's Past pp. 163, 65, 27, 157, Ch III, IV, Hist of Sans Lit Ch I, & V)

began to be divorced from daily life. Buddhism solidified into a separate sect based solely on the teachings of Buddha as interpreted by its priests. When Hiuen Tsiang came to India about 649 A. D., he found large Viharas where thousands of monks lived, prayed and also taught, but kept aloof from worldly worries and contamination. Apparently the body was sound but the canker of self-gain and self-salvation was eating at the core. He saw at the Prayaga fair king Siladitya who distributed in charity all his money, jewellery and valuables until he had to borrow even clothes for himself and his Rani to wear. He, it seems, did this periodically; money taken from his hard earning subjects given to priests and others of the kin that gather at fairs, money which should have gone to the welfare of his people lavished on persons who had done nothing to deserve it—so that Siladitya might attain salvation.

Buddha had stopped wholesale sacrifice of animals and debauches of drunkenness, and had stressed on purity of heart as real worship. He denounced the various gods and would not believe in any god at all, but after his death he himself was made into a god and worshipped with lengthening rites and ceremonies. Hindu gods multiplied apace, and their ceremonies grew in length and complexity. To check this decadence arose many reformers including Shankara and Ramanuja. Later on Chaitanya, Kabir and Nanak tried to stem Islamic conversions; in recent times the Theosophists, the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj have attempted to revive in Hinduism a sense of self-respect, based on their interpretations of the old faith.

But curiously men who enthusiastically joined these new recent faiths are steadily sliding towards the older beliefs. Is it sheer perversity, or want of moral fibre, or human laziness and weakness? Or is there something in the old faith which, howsoever unconsciously, meets the needs and yearnings of the aching human heart, which these brand new shining creeds do not supply. Perchance there may be in the old Hindu religion, despite its seeming crudities and superstitions something which gives a closer approach to the gracious power that guides human life, gives solace to the burdened heart and provides a dearer object of love and self-surrender than it finds in the clearer colder

tenets. The older Hindu faith might possibly have germs of light which when uncovered might purify Hinduism and be a beacon to wider and loftier ideals.

But a new ferment has started within Hinduism itself which is more potent for the destruction of Hindu religion than any it has faced so far.

CHAPTER III

THE DECAY OF HINDUISM

The political decay of Hinduism came with Muslim invasion. In places where Hinduism was purer and was more or less geographically protected, as in the South of India and the hills, the people maintained their political freedom, but in the North, over-tolerant and divided Hinduism could not withstand the rude onslaughts of a strong people who had a fanatical faith in their beliefs and had a definite goal to achieve.

Hindu religion itself is alive to-day for it had strong foundations, being based on truth, and it is to this that in spite of a thousand years of Muslim domination, and hundreds of years of Christian persuation, it is still living. Contemporary religions of Arabia, Turkistan, Asia Minor Persia and Egypt, all disappeared under Islamic zeal, whilst the various religions of Greece and Rome, and the tribal religions of Northern Europe fell to Christian propaganda ; the Parsis are only a handful in India ; and the Jews are scattered all over the face of the globe.

In India the ideal of other-worldliness, teaching that the life after death is far more important than the present life, helped also by the ascetic tendencies of Buddhism and Jainism, made renunciation of worldly life the supreme goal. The Grihastha Hindu who had to live in society could get something of this ineffable gain in old age by retiring from the world, whilst the fortunate were those who took to Sanyas from early childhood. This lost to the community not only the services of millions of Sadhus, but deprived society of the mature guidance of men of experience. Even now to the heart of most Hindus of mature age is the constant appeal to retire to seclusion safe from the distractions and troubles of the world, to spend time in Bhagwat Bhajan and in striving to secure one's own salvation.

Even so late as the sixteenth century the ideal of Roman Catholics in Europe was to secure the salvation of one's own self. In India this idea predominated. The earlier ideal in Buddhism was the Hinayana faith where the concern was to secure one's own salvation by any means. The last teaching of Buddha "Now, O, Monks ! I take leave of you. All things are composite and all are transient ; work with diligence for the goal of freedom" was said to point to this goal a few centuries later when Buddhism took stock of itself. The Mahayana faith was promulgated where the goal was to secure the salvation of all other beings, and Buddha was worshipped as Avaloketishwara, the divine person, who from on high looking down with pity on suffering humanity would not enter into salvation until the salvation of all had been gained. Buddha taught that all life is pain, the cause of pain is desire and freedom consists in the cutting off of desires. Hinayana tried to obtain this by retiring as a recluse, whilst Buddha had said that this could be achieved by right thought and right work ; his own life showed that desire can be obliterated by forgetting one's self in working for and helping others, for non-attachment comes in working when there is no desire at all for self.

In Hinduism the ideal of securing self-salvation by concentrating all thoughts and activities on one's own self predominated. This was also fostered by priests as it was to their advantage. They claimed with authority to show the shortest and best way to attain salvation ; their verdict was not to be questioned. This curtailment of freedom of thought led to curtailment of freedom in social life and political growth. Reciting Mantras whose meaning was not to be enquired, making sacrifices to gods, giving gifts, making temples, visiting places denominated as holy, belief in holy hours and days, charms and incantations, all were avidly practised to gain the beatific end. Self-salvation became the paramount concern of life. A son was said to be necessary so that he would offer oblations to enable the father to enter swarga ; the wife in mounting the Sati pyre also helped the husband heavenwards. Hindu philosophy teaches that each is a part of the Divine whole, but in practice the tiny wheel tried to appropriate to itself the aim of being the hub of the huge machine and worked for its own greatness than for

being a useful part of the whole. It was not that they were created for the furtherance of the great divine purpose and their salvation lay in helping forward His design, but rather that the Divine was to be worshipped to help forward their salvation. Instead of man being an humble servant of the Divine, the Divine, it might be well said, becomes the instrument of man to secure his entrance into eternal bliss. From childhood onward this idea, this concentration on one's own self, some how or other, persists until in early old age a few are tempted to throw aside all obligations, to go into seclusion, to think on self and be engrossed with one's own self—nothing else matters but that they should get the very best fruit that life has to offer.

This concentration on self-gain produced a certain atmosphere of selfishness. To these people, beyond one's self but much farther came the family, then the sub-caste, the caste, and so on. This thinking on self naturally bred the idea of self-importance and disregard and contempt of others. The story of Prithwi Raj and Jaipal is well known. When Mahmud went to attack Somnath he passed, it is said, through the desert territories of Hindu Rajas who could have destroyed his army in the sands, but they let him pass unmolested as they were not directly concerned. The ideal generally was every one for himself. It was only when they themselves were attacked that they could temporarily combine, but if they could profit otherwise men were not wanting who took the side of the other party. In Muslim times Hindu kings helped freely in subduing other Hindu kings for the glory of Islam.

This idea of personal gain tinctured their whole life. They had no external cause which they wanted to prevail and for which they would sacrifice themselves—no growth of the nation, no spread of Hinduism, no extension of Aryan rule, nor the promulgation of any truth or principle. In many cases it became sheer concentration on one's own profit.

Contrast this with the nobility of Hindu women who stand unmatched even to-day in any religion or country. Their sole purpose in life was sacrificing themselves for the good of their husbands. She gave her service, all her interest in life, and even sacrificed her very life

for the good of her husband, and in doing so she exalts Hindu womanhood. She gives her all, she rises; but when he tries to absorb all he falls.

Hinduism gave hardly a definite standpoint or clear guidance for Hindus. The highest concept of the Divine is Nirakara, (without form), the Absolute. To conceive of the inconceivable is impossible. In order to worship, the mind has to hold on to some definite concept and for this purpose gods had to be introduced. All the gods are great and as they have different characteristics, the Hindu mind gets no sure lead. They worship too many gods and all of them are limited. The servant of too many masters can have no character, the servant of one master can have some, but it is only the independent man who can have a strong and free character. To Mohammedans the promise is clear,—"Follow the teachings of Mohammed and you are saved"; to Christians, "Believe (in Christ) and you shall be saved". To them the law is clear, the road to approach their highest is definitely laid down. With them the highest goal is their heaven, and that is secure; with Hindus the highest goal is freedom, and that is unobtainable through Hindu gods, for they themselves are finite, as for the Absolute, it is inconceivable. There is hardly any clear glad morning for the worshipper or certain refuge of any sort. The worshipper of any of the gods can not afford to offend any other god; he can have no courage and no self-confidence. Of the three highest deities, Brahma is busy making his clay images of creation and has no concern with the welfare of humanity; Vishnu is asleep in his *Ksheer Sagar*; and Mahadeva, in snow-capped Kailash, is deep in his formless Samadhi. There is no guidance, no one to say,—"go and do likewise." The ordinary Hindu has an idea of Brahman being behind all these gods but as it is so indefinite it has no impelling effect on character. The religious books too show no clear way. The Gita with all its beauty and deep learning and the immense influence it is at present wielding is full of contradictory theories, so that commentators of different shades of opinion have been finding messages to further their own theories, and none dare say they are false. The Upanishads are the same, and many too deep and mystic for the lay-man. The divine Vedas are called the lower knowledge. The whole ground need not be gone over. What a

brilliant galaxy of variegated lights, but none bright enough to show the road clearly. Hinduism is a great and glorious religion,—but what it is hardly any lay-man can say clearly.

It is said that all paths lead to the Divine, but to reach the east if we start westwards we will have circled the globe to reach our destination. All gods are true and all have something of the Divine in them, but the Gita clearly says that worshippers of ghosts go only as far as ghost lands, of the spirits and Devas only up to them, but it is only the worshippers of ME, the highest of gods, who come to ME, the Supreme. There is only one, the highest truth, and the others are lower truths. It is said that the man who sincerely worships the lower gods is better than him who makes a pretence at worshipping the higher. But the comparison is in quality and not merely in kind. A man who swings on a hook before a village god with faith is decidedly lower than say Tulshi Dass or Shankaracharya.

The chief test of a high character is the following of a truth despite redicule and opposition. Hinduism held all gods to be true. When Mohammedans and Christians said "our gods are the highest and the best," Hindus said, "your gods are also true," and some began worshipping them as well ; they installed images of the Virgin in the South as Mariamma, and in the North worshipped tombs of Muslim saints, and some went so far as to keep the Ramazan fasts in the olden days. Naturally those of the other lower faiths who said they were the highest, became leaders, and the others remained mere followers. This resulted in a tendency to exercise no discretion between the high and the low, the clean and the unclean, the right and the wrong. What suited the interest for the time was often regarded as the true ; the cheif concern and test to them became their personal gain—whichever god or ideal for the time suited them best that was to be followed ; there remained no courage to say that this is the truth and by this we abide, we stand or fall. When every god was equal to the highest, when, to many, every religion was true, there could be no unity anywhere, none in ideals, none in concentration for a common purpose and no common sympathy and fellow feeling. It resulted in an atmosphere

wherein people were generally working for their own selves, their own benefit and greatness.

But these old people had certain definite beliefs for which they stood and which helped them to survive as a Hindu for so long. The old Hindu may have been unlettered, superstitious, primeval in beliefs but he had a certain character. His religion consisted in *Varna ashrama dharma*, the following of caste obligations. He would starve than eat food touched by polluted hands, he must bathe first and cook his food in a certain way before he could eat at all ; touch of the lowest castes was pollution and had to be purified by baths ; no temptation of money or beauty would tempt him to marry out of caste. He would follow his caste rules, and the customs of his family at considerable self-sacrifice. Further he had his beliefs in certain things held sacred. For the worship of his idols and his temple he would even give his life ; to do pilgrimages in fulfilment of a vow he would take long arduous, and, in those days, dangerous journeys ; a chance hurt to a Brahmin or a cow would be expiated by terrible penances. The king was worshipped as a god, and it is this want of personal reverence which has made false evidence so common in courts. Get a man to swear with a stone idol in his hands, a Brahmin holding the sacred thread, a witness to testify in a temple or on the banks of a sacred river, then he dare not speak but the exact truth. Stories from sacred books, mainly Rama's story, had a personal appeal to him. The obedience to father or elder brother was held sacred ; the help of one who came as a refugee (as *Sharanagata*) even if he was an enemy, the duty of rendering help to friends in distress, of helping the marriage of a daughter, the maintenance of poor relations however narrow your own circumstances, the feeding of guests even if you go hungry, the performance of a promise once given however irksome, were held sacred duties. These were part of his religion ; for any breach of them he would have to pay in full, in some way or other in this world, and also of a certainty in the next. There was besides a great deal of discipline in life,—in fasts on certain days, in the regulations about cooking and eating, in performing the daily worship, in giving of charity, the performance of vows, and in methods of cleanliness.

Besides there was the ideal of renunciation at advancing old age which gave a saner value to worldly possessions and bred a spirit of truth, honesty and courage. When one has decided to leave behind, one day, all worldly accumulations and entanglements, to go and live simply in some place of pilgrimage and in many cases to subsist on alms, then riches, honours and worldly luxuries drop off their glamour, they are lightly forsaken if Dharma or some other ideal is at stake. This is a corrective so much needed in these materialistic times. All these things gave a stiffening to the character, made men definite, and fostered a habit of self-denial, self-sacrifice and fortitude.

Hinduism believed in no religious dogma about God. It remains a puzzle to western thought. A man may believe in one God, or in many gods or in no god at all ; his gods would be numerous, often contradicting one another, and he would believe in them all, and yet affirm that there were in truth no gods at all. With this multifariousness and catholicity in beliefs there could be no religious persecutions or bigotry. The binding force of Hinduism was its caste, but caste is slowly losing its virtue with the open advent of outsiders in the Hindu fold through Shuddhi, the progress of intermarriage between castes and with other religions, interdining, removal of untouchability, and the open flouting of caste-laws ; caste is tending to become merely a shadow. The holy places are becoming slowly to a section, though still very minute, of the educated classes, places of beautiful scenery or historic associations ; idols, pieces of carved stone ; fairs, occasions of tamasha ; the holy rivers, mere streams, in places very filthy ; doing Shraddha and Gaya for ancestors, a farce ; the Brahmin, an anachronism ; and the Vedas, books made by superstitious priests. In the old days if a man broke his caste regulations he was outcasted and had no place in society, he was tolerated akin to the beast of the field. But now things which would have horrified our grandfathers are generally overlooked or accepted as a matter of course. Hinduism hitherto consisted of two, and only two things,—the following of caste-laws, and the worship and reverence for things held holy by ancient tradition. To a goodly portion of the new generation both these things are decreasing in value ; they have no

appeal to, and no following from, him. Western education and contact is wiping off many of the old beliefs ; it is not a gradual change permitting new plants to take the place of dead trees, but a sudden overwhelming flood when things believed to be firm as mountains were found gone in the course of a night ; and what has taken its place—what beliefs, what religious bindings, what unselfish ideals ?, the tragedy of it is,—nothing whatever.

In the olden days the Brahmin had usually certain hard duties and obligations. The early years of a large number of them were spent in brain-racking Sanskrit studies living as a semi-beggar ; the subsequent portion was also often passed in a similar condition, teaching boys, doing poojahs, helping at marriages and deaths, and being invariably miserably paid for it all. Sudama was the typical Brahmin of this kind, he may be rich in book-lore, but always in rags. His life was no soft couch of ease. Long before sun-rise he got up, had his shivering bath by the open well-side even in the chilliest of winters, sat down for his long course of worship, and then the dull repetition of the daily lesson for the students. He must cook his own food, or at best his wife would cook his scanty meal, meats and drink were forbidden to him, and his life was a stranger to song, dance and merrymaking. No sane man, not even the Sudra, would exchange his easy life, the meats and drinks, the convivial parties and amusements for such a Brahmin lenten fare. The one thing the Brahmin cherished was pride in his caste, his holiness, and his book-knowledge, but it was an unalluring recompense for usually a meagre and very often a miserable existence. The Kshattriya too, despite his fierce moustache and turned-up beard, his prancing horse and rattling sword, and the proud title and the respect of a Raja or a Raj-poota, had often not an enviable time. Wars and tribal feuds were an everyday occurrence, and the only people who had to go in them was this knightly class. The result was that the tradition grew that the best death for a Kshattriya was on field of battle ; their lives were cut short early, or they nursed maimed bodies ; Kshattriya families abounded in widows and orphans, and some gloried in their old stories of Johars and Satis. What Buniya plying his peaceful trade or what agriculturist

working hard and living simply would exchange his lot to become such a high-browed Thakur, but to be haled every other day to gain wounds or to achieve martyrdom on the field of battle. Better a simple pleasant life with the joys of family and friends than the starving veneration of a Pandit or the fatal glory of a Kshattriya. But now the obligations have disappeared and the respect given is only to birth with the result that all the other castes are claiming to be really Brahmins and Kshattriyas. It is all so easy. As in the case of the castes where obligations have disappeared and only the name remains which any one can appropriate, so in Hinduism, the contents have all vanished and only the label remains ; and a tin, whatever be its label, but empty of contents, is prone to be noisy. A few critics with good show of reasoning are saying that the various new movements for re-vivifying Hinduism are its dying flickers. Cynically they say that when there is nothing in the contents of belief in Hinduism, when educated people, who are always in the van of new movements of progress, are losing faith in all that consists of Hinduism, then what chance is there of rousing to activity a wounded man dying of loss of blood increasingly, by beating warlike drums. When Hinduism itself is meaning less and less to a large body of its growing educated sons, how can it ask strangers to accept it ?

With this loss of religious belief, the loss of a high ideal impelling one to sacrifice oneself for it, the only goal now left to this small but steadily growing class is self-gain, to advance one's self not as a means to an ulterior end but as the end itself. One's own self is becoming to them the god to be worshipped. The goal of self-salvation, has given place to the goal of self-advancement. Gain money, honours, luxury, popularity, following, keep yourself always in the limelight ; gain every thing for yourself ; the means don't matter so long as you are not exposed and degraded, or caught in the meshes of law—the fear of punishment in the hereafter, which to them has no being .or is a nebulous idea—does not exist. As in the olden days short cuts to salvation,—charms, incantations, poojahs were preferred to a true life strictly lived, so even now facile ways to self-promotion and popularity are getting popular ; flattery and backbiting, unreliable business dealing,

a growing spirit of gambling, (name it how you will), false cases with false witnesses, corruption, pleasing speeches, false promises, changing principles, self-advertisement and trying every form of extremism to attract attention ; to follow any method, however opposed to honour or integrity, so long as it helps you to get on. Just as formerly religion was used as a cover to do all sorts of things that one wanted to do,—thieving, robbing and murdering as Thugs ; drinking and debauchery as Vama Marga ; invading and looting other states (but seldom among Hindus) for difference in faith,—so to these self-seekers religion is now used as a cloak for self-advancement, for posts and honour, for catching votes and even for influencing justice. It is all self-gain by various devices. "India is rapidly going down. A long purse and a happy home are looked upon as the ultimate destiny of man......... ... People of a country which never spurned poverty are growing afraid to be poor." *a* In religious observances themselves mostly mere lip-service is given ; in private, men often admit that they have no faith in these religious rites ; they obviously perform them for outward show and as a sort of mental soporific ; whilst the want of firm belief and faith, which comes only by the assent of conviction based on reason is sought to be replaced by a crowd of these worshippers by excess of emotionalism. Emotion which is a very good helper, but a blind guide, is exalted by them as the essence of religion ; "their heart swoons in a drunken ecstacy of emotion."*b* "When they touch upon emotion they grow sentimental, when they reason they are childish."

This new spirit would infect Hindu women too ; they used to believe in their gods, and the worship of the husband was held as their highest duty. Western education would remove all these beliefs. As to a body of men there remains no other ideal save personal gain by any means so to women inclining that way it would be nothing else but personal enjoyment and pleasure at any cost. Traces of this trend of thought, this want of some high ideal in life, this greater love and pursuit of pleasure are even now pointed out in some ultra-refined ladies.

*a.................The Philosophy of Rabindra Nath Tagore, by S Radha Krishnan p 186
*b.................Sadhana by R N Tagore p 127
*c.................The Philosophy of R N Tagore by S Radha Krishnan p 204

The number is bound to increase as a necessary consequence. And when this infects the ideal of Hindu women, Hinduism would be doomed,—doomed for ever.

Then what would remain for this rapidly growing body,—with no belief in religion, with no ideal except self advance at any cost and by any means, with no ultimate object except trimming one's sail to pursue every personal gain ? They would be a non-descript class, with no distinguishing marks, calling themselves Hindus, having no character, principles, backbone, or ideals, but always talking big of the wonderful things they would do, designing magnificent castles, which having no foundations would be daily tumbling around them, and the sole purpose of whose life would be a search after self-gain and self-glory, or the sensual pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment.

The new party finding no substance in Hinduism, holding it mostly sham and empty loud-sounding phrases, are revolting against it. The more courageous among them, who do think independently, are beginning to say that they are not Hindus. They are discarding Hinduism which to them has no meaning, no message ; they call themselves whatsoever catches their mind ;—they are Indians, or deists, or theists, but hardly Hindus. Their number is increasing, the leaven is multiplying fast, and it is significant that orthodox Hinduism does not denounce them or outcaste them, however few they are at present. It is no use anathematizing western education and contact which is only helping to explode old falsities, or removing things unsuited to present conditions.

This spirit of revolt is slowly spreading in all departments of life, and finding no solution a few are running to extremes. They are revolting in politics to their political subjection, and the wilder spirits among them seek recourse even to bombs and revolutionary activities ; against present methods of education by denominational universities, new types of schools, and new methods of teaching ; against industries by Khadism and a fight against capital ; against trade methods by tariffs, state ownership and exclusion of foreign capital ; and above all against the old religion by removal of caste, etc.

These new ardent seekers would remove the existing system and substitute brand new methods, copied in their externals from the West. They think that by changing these methods and systems will India be brought to her true eminence. In the past generation the way to greatness was computed by some to be in copying the externals of the West ; to adopt English clothes, with a sola-topee concealing a large crown-lock ; houses were after European designs, but the method of living was orthodox ; names were twisted to appear foreign, Indian shopkeepers traded under English names, and it was considered the correct thing to speak the vernacular as an Englishman does. The one way to advance then was felt, by the ultra radical, to copy western methods in political, industrial and social work. No man or nation ever grew to greatness solely by copying others. The need is for growth from within and then such external things as would be needed would be acquired. The basic need is not the sword and armour, but first the justness of the cause, then the courage of the heart, thereafter the strength of the muscle, after which comes the armour, and last of all plumes, heraldic designs and embellishments, and at the tail-end the page to blow the bugle.

Hindus have some very good qualities. They are obedient, render intelligent service and are fairly honest. It is said they are good servants, but it is also said that they have no capacity to lead, to take initiative or to exercise independent judgment in crises. To reach an objective, there usually are two or more methods each of them nearly equally good. In a nation as in a crowd, the leader becomes one who says "I know the truth, all the rest are wrong, follow me". And having self-confidence in himself he leads, and if he has had some glimpse of the truth and has courage, becomes a recognised leader and hero. There are usually equally wise or wiser men in the crowd but they remain mute and inglorious. Islam (for example) says, "I alone know the true way". Some Hindus would probably say "You know the true way, we know the true way, they, as well, know the true way, all know the true way". Islam says, "No ! I alone know the true and direct way; you can go to a place following all points of the compass

circumambulating the globe. I alone know the best and shortest way, follow me", and it leads. This vacillation in the Hindus is mainly the result of their religion. When every god is the highest, when everything is true, one cannot stand up for any particular thing as true against the other half-truths and speciousnesses. When, in many homes, obedience throughout life from childhood onwards, to priest-craft and authority even when opposed inside the heart to common-sense and reason, is right conduct, when their eyes have to be blind-folded to patent falsities, then freedom of thought and initiative cannot well be expected of them. It is only when thought is free, when truth is seen, understood and followed, can a man have self-confidence and can become a leader.

Other religions originally took their rise from tribal traditions which were full of myths, exaggerations and superstitious tales. They have been slowly changing, removing and improving them until a noble growing structure is now standing. Hinduism laid down firm, unshakable foundations but it is encumbered with ruins of fallen walls of poor materials, with rubbish brought from outside and dumped on the site, and with a jungle of weeds and wild trees, whilst the old foundations peep through here and there, so that it is now a picturesque ruin of an ancient greatness. If it has to survive, Hinduism must first clear this rubbish, uncover its firm foundations and raise on them a noble edifice based on truth and supported by reason and knowledge.

No religion has given so much importance to truth and reason as Hinduism. It calls the Divine सत्यस्य सत्यम् (the true of the true, or the essence of truth) Brahman is सत्यमायतनम् (Kena. Up. IV. 8) (the abode of truth) सत्यमेवजयते (Mund. Up. III. 6) (only truth conquers) सन्मूला (Chhand. Up. VI. 8. 4.) (based on truth). The prayer of the heart is असतोमासद्गमय (Brihad. Up. I. III. 27.) (From the untrue lead me to the true). Mahatma Gandhi says, "My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth .... the indescribable lustre of Truth, a million times more intense than that of the sun" (Experiments with Truth). The prime Reality from which creation sprang is called in Hinduism Sat or Truth.

As for Reason, God's chief shape is said to be pure intelligence, शुद्धज्ञानस्वरूपिणे (having the form of pure intelligence), विशुद्धज्ञानदेहाय, विज्ञानघन. God's nature is Truth and His shape is pure intelligence. *Any proposition not having the support of truth and reason is not divine. It is only when one takes stand on such truth that one has self-confidence and is fearless; ब्रह्माऽभयंवै (Brahman is fearlessness) not afraid of the assaults of hard facts and demolishing proofs.

Hinduism must also provide a clear goal which is to be constantly striven for but never to be fully obtained, having as its result the growth and welfare of the whole of human life. It is not to be mere rituals and ceremonies to be performed and laid aside, not mere exaltations of the emotion for the hour or two, but a steady constant light to illumine the whole of life's path all the day and night. The directions should be clear, definite, and unambiguous, how life is to be led in its various happenings but should be so graded as to help the savant and the child-mind. As a religion it must provide an object of worship, a personal God, a Being of illimitable power, yet with a heart full of tenderest love and mercy, the highest conception possible of god-head, always ready to come to the help of any human being in distress or need. Moreover this belief should have been taken from the ancient and accepted beliefs of Hinduism, not foreign ideas grafted to the Hindu faith, nor a part magnified and said to convey the whole. Only if it can thus be re-interpreted shall Hinduism survive amidst the daily crash of falling faiths and creeds.

*Hinduism is full of references that the Divine is Truth and Reason, सत an ज्ञान. "Buddha in Kalma Sutta says, "Do not believe in what ye have heard in old tradition, nor in written pages, nor the authority of your teachers and elders, after observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good of all, then accept it and live up to it" (Vedanta Philosophy by M. Muller p. 114)

CHAPTER IV

THE IDEALS

Hinduism is a maze from which hardly anything emerges clear. Learned scholars would argue for whole days—even for years— on the differing qualities of the Divine, whether He is Advait, or Dvait, and the various subdivisions of the beliefs without coming to any settlement. How to apprehend Him brings the complication of Bhakti, Jnana and Karma, about which perpetual differences have been going on. Then there is the galaxy of the gods, numberless and varied, each worshipped as the sole giver of salvation,—and who can say which is high or low, when all are great. The sacred scriptures, the Vedas, are a sealed book practically to all, but one of its own later books holds the real Vedas as of low value. Most of the sacred books have differing translations according to the views of the translator. By the time one finishes the investigation as to what to definitely believe in Hinduism the mind gets into a hopeless puzzle. The whole appears so full of inconsistencies, interpolations, and contradictions that the way appears lost.

The chief greatness of Hinduism lies in its joining religion to philosophy. Other religions lay down certain propositions which the faithful must believe and queries cannot be introduced ; they have to be taken on faith, in whose province reason has no authority to question. Philosophy is a search for truth, and Hinduism imports this search in its religion ; no dictum is to be accepted until it can be difinitely proved by sound argument. Max Muller says that it is only in India that philosophy is looked on as the outcome of religion, as its most precious flower and fragrance. In India the two are inseparable, and they would have been inseparable with us, he says, if fear of man had not been greater than fear of God or of Truth.*

Hinduism is justly proud of its philosophy which, in its clear search

Philosophy Ch I by Max Muller

for truth, says that if even the Vedas are not according to truth they are not to be followed. About the final First Cause, the Absolute, the Brahman, it says it transcends human intellect. The only way to speak of it is by negatives, *Neti, Neti,* (not this). This is not nihilistic, that there was nothing in the beginning, 'for how can some thing come out of nothing'. The only way to reach it is by affirming *Astit,* "It is". But what It is when the mind does not reach it and the senses fail to grasp, how can the tongue shape it. If we say that it is 'this' then it is not 'that', but It is both this and that. If we say that creation is a part of It, then what remains behind would be less than the whole. With a limited human mind we cannot grasp the illimitable. But the heart can realise that It exists and can affirm. In his disputations Yajnavalkya arrives at the most interesting conclusion that theoretically Brahman is unknowable, but can be apprehended practically. (Bri. Up. 3-1-9)

The world is only a manifestation of Him. If we say that He created the world out of something then we have to posit two Reals in the beginning. As there cannot be two First Causes so we have to say that this world is a manifestation of the one Divine. It is the life of the tree and the matter of the tree as well. Take away the life and the tree as such disappears ; take away the matter of the tree, the life becomes non-existent to us. For "His are the worlds and He is the world itself as well." How it is so, we do not know, it is beyond our intellect ; it is mystery, Maya (try to understand it as you like). When there is one Real behind all creation then this very force lies behind human beings as well. There is no separate creation, only one continuing chain of evolution,—electrons, planets, rocks, plants, animals, man—all differing forms of the one growing force. And as the progress of evolution is from matter to spirit, from the unintelligent to the intelligent, so the Supreme Fact towards which creation is evolving is Supreme intelligence, and it is only in this form that our mind can comprehend it. To find Him still further look into your soul, the root of intelligence in you, and in your *atman* will you perceive some reflection of the glory of the *Param Atman.*

*A History of Sanskrit Literature by A Macdonnell, Ch VIII

But the idea of the Illimitable Absolute gives no guidance and help to the human heart. The Undefinable must be expressed by adjectives which, though they mar His greatness, yet bring the idea within our comprehension. The Ganges has to leave the abode of Vishnu and Siva, and to mingle with sand, earth and dirt to bring its beneficence to parching humanity. Adjectives give only a very partial idea of Him, but to enter our minds the idea has to be limited just as He has limited Himself in creation.

Hinduism says that to convey an idea the subject must have a name and form, mere abstract definitions convey no definite picture to the mind. In Rig Veda there were various gods, but western scholars were puzzled when they saw each god worshipped and described as the highest of all gods, there appeared no gradation among them, and they called it henotheism. But the same thing exists to-day. Look into the *stotra* (hymn) of any god, and he is described as the highest of gods,[1] each small pilgrimage delineated as the one gate to salvation, each holy book as the sure bringer of freedom, and each sacred performance as resulting in certain Moksha to the doer and his seven generations of ancestors. The Vedas, however, repeatedly say that there is only one Reality which has different names, and positing this it cannot well be said that gods have different entities. There were Indra, Varuna, the Maruts, the Agni, etc., all partaking of the same highest dignity yet with different functions. To the man suffering from fever, the Lord God of Battles has no appeal, he wants either the Curer of all ills,

[1] There are numerous references to it —

एकमसद्विप्रावहुधावदन्ति-अग्निंयम मातरिश्वानमाहु:

(R V 1 164 46)

There is One whom the wise call variously, they call him Agni, Yama, Matarisvan

एकम·तंवहुधा कल्पयन्ति

(R V 10 114 5)

There is one imagined variously

वहूनिममनामानिकीर्तितानिमहाऋषभि:

(Mah Bh.-Sh Parva)

My names are many declared by the great seers

Other references are Ath Ved 10 8 28 -13 4 15 -10 3 13 R V 5 3 1 -Mait-Up 4 5.6 -Mund.Up 1 1 1.-Tait Up 1-Bri. Up 1 4.-6 7 10.-4 4 20 - See also, 'The Philosophy of the Upanishads "p. 20 and 'The Hindu Life' pp 28 29 by Prof Radha Krishnan

or the Divine Mother to soothe his burning brow. This saves the anomaly of the Prince of Peace being prayed to to help us annihilate the enemy and to ravage his lands ; for the same cross to shine on the chest of the sister of mercy as adorns the hilt of the combatant. Other religions have saints who perform their different functions, to help the mariner, to cure the sick, to aid the warrior and so on, but they are all minor entities, limited mortals who did their good and passed away, leaving behind a little fragrance. Hinduism appealed to the Highest, but with different names, having different forms for different functions, (instead of leaving ideas vague, it always tried to give a form to a name), and the appeal to the lowest of gods is in reality to the highest. It saves the incongruity of the same person performing contradictory actions or of the Supreme Creator of the universes being daily appealed to for our trifling aches and needs.

The Rig Vedic gods were not defined and clear ; attributes of one are ascribed to another, and they lack individuality and character. They are a beginning of the idea that all gods are one under different names. When about Asoka's time a regular hierearchy of gods was framed, they were given appropriate names, forms, and symbols.

But concepts of imaginary helpers are not enough. The gods were limited concepts of the Supreme, but the concept had still more to be limited to be of practical use to us. The greatest men that Hinduism had produced were made incarnations, and, being human beings, they had their shortcomings, but came nearer us as practical examples. Every ideal has to assume limitations and defects to bring its realisation in practical life. The ideal in the artist's mind in order to be expressed, has to contend with limitations of paints, brushes, and canvas, the shortcomings in the model and the limitations of the hand of the artist himself. The idea of the Divine, to reach humanity, has to percolate through limiting adjectives, the idea of partial gods, and the frail human ideal men ; and it gains its highest effect by the personal contact of the *guru*, the father, or the teacher, all of whom have manifest shortcomings. It is only through the imperfect th[illegible] we can obtain some distant view of the Perfect. "And [illegible]

realise God without name and form?" says Keyserling. "Not Shankara, nor Ramanuja, for they sacrificed assiduously, and followed the old faith. It is impossible for men to concentrate their soul except on a visible object............ .The Hindu saints, having attained to union with Brahman, knew all concrete religious manifestations as of human origin. Nevertheless they sacrificed to one god or an other, knowing such practices benefit the soul. Ramakrishna kept to the worship of of Kali, the heavenly mother, as best suited to his nature, for he knew that no one form was intrinsically adequate to divinity. All salvation consists in recognition and faith prepares the way; the subconscious is impressed by a man's belief and produces a development in accordance with the image in which he believes. If the image is well chosen it accelerates inner progress more quickly than independent thinking would do, provided the idea finds a believing soul."

Hinduism selected a few of the prominent functions of the Divine and allotted them to various gods giving each of them suitable names and forms with appropriate weapons and vehicles. They are symbols, or rather mnemonical signs, to convey the entire idea at a glance. These gods are not entities in themselves, but only aids to the mind for concentration and suggestion. Badrayana says that Reality is beyond and not contained in the *pratikas* or symbols which are permitted in view of the weakness of men.* (Ved. Sutra IV.1.4.) *a* M. Recejac defines mysticism as "the tendency to draw near to the Absolute morally and by the aid of symbols". *b* These symbols are not fetishes, to be worshipped as such, but are an aid to the mind.

Lower than the gods come the divine men, the incarnations, to serve as examples. We may talk of impersonal beings, says Swami Vivekananda, but so long as we are ordinary mortals, God can be seen in man alone. *c* Maeterlinck says that man has the power to "fashion,

*Travel Diary of a Philosopher Vol 1 pp 227 228 238 239

*a-1-Indian Philosophy, by Radha Krishnan Vol II p 441

2-Yajna-valkya says, replying to Vidagdha, that gods are local and particular manifestations of the one life in various functions under a variety of names. (The Philosophy of the Upanishads, by A E Gough, p 172)

*b- Varieties of Religious Experience, by W James, p. 407

*c-o Lectures from Colombo to America (On Bhakti)

after a divine model that he chooses not, a great moral personality composed in equal parts of himself and the ideal ; and that if anything lies in the fullest reality, of a surety it is that."

Hindu images are not relics of barbarism, they were framed for a purpose which they express in the simplest of symbols, and express Hindu belief in the activities of God in His various relations with humanity. Hindu writers repeatedly say that the worship of the material gods as such is the lowest and most degrading, *a* but it is only through the dust and the dirt of the road that we can reach the abode of the beloved. They are a necessary preliminary, but the inn by the wayside is not to be our permanent abode. The images were made to convey certain definite directions, but the meaning is disregarded, and the external image alone is worshipped, and the bottle of medicine has been made into a charm to cure diseases.



Treasure of the Humble, by M Maeterlinck (The Deeper Life)

*a वाह्यपूजाधमाधमा

CHAPTER V

VISHNU AND BRAHMA

Man has been from earliest times conscious of an Intelligent Energy which has been guiding and controlling the world and his own destiny ; and he has been trying to find and define it. Even in Rig Vedic times the quest was कस्मैदेवायहविषाविधेम् (to what god shall we offer worship) and continues to-day.

Other religions affirmed an anthropomorphic god, a grander Being, but like our own human selves, sitting in the highest space beyond, making worlds as we make our material articles and judging men of their actions. Hinduism could not do this, as the idea did not conform to its theories of God and creation. It had to conceive of the Divine according to its own theory of the Intelligent Energy, the fashioning of the world, and God's relation with mankind.

Hinduism holds that human mind is incapable of conceiving the highest,—of the speck of sand to grasp the vast continents of mountains and seas. At King Janaka's discussions, Yajnavalkya chided Gargeyi when she wanted to know the First cause of the First Cause. To bring the idea within our minds we have to admit that there was something at first, something from which, as a chicken springs from an egg, energy itself sprang. The first manifestation of this energy must have been in the shape of dormant energy and then from it when it became active creation must have sprung—the same energy through its various developments creating creation of divers kinds. The original state was of *Tamas* (inertia) which when ruffled by the action

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*बहुधाशक्तियोगात्वर्णानऽनेकाननिहितार्थो दधाति
(By its varied energies gives different forms for different purposes.

of *Rajas* produced creation, and Purusha and Prakriti,—spirit and matter,—became active giving rise to growing and evolving form ;—the calm deep sea was ruffled on the surface raising waves to carry ships to their various destinations. The spirit puts on its various forms. It is form only that we see and not the spirit, but after our death, the form disintegrates and the immortal part, the spirit, survives. Behind all creation, behind Prakriti, donning various vestures in her dance, is the spirit of the universe, the Ishwara, the personal god, who is nearest to us, our hope and support in life's journey.

But how are we to conceive of this Divine Force, when all that can be said of it is that it is an ineffable essence. Shankaracharya, positing Brahman behind the ever-changing whirl of creation, says, it is beyond the highest reach of thought and saying this, himself worships the various illusory gods, composes hymns to Siva, Vishnu, Durga, Krishna, calling them each the highest of gods. He could not be a hypocrite, deliberately deceiving others—his worship is too open and honest. He realised, as Hinduism and other religions as well, realise that the Divine to be brought under human concept must be limited, and must be given a name and a form. A line in geometry must have a breadth on the blackboard. **उपासकानांकार्यार्थंब्रह्मणोरूपकल्पणा** (For the use of the worshippers, Brahman has to be imagined with a form.)

But what qualities are we to give Him? He is the storehouse of all qualities and to repeat only a minute part of them would be extremely lengthy and tedious. Hindus knew of the value of economy of effort ; it was the Sutra period when a single word indicated a whole philosophic theory. Three things were necessary ; the first was that the various concepts of the divine should be graded according to their qualities ; then that names should be given to these gods from the ancient Hindu pantheon as might be suited to them ; and lastly that appropriate forms should be devised for them in conformity to their functions. These forms were merely mnemonical symbols, to enable worshippers to be reminded at a glance of the various functions of the

god. Just as to us the word Vibgyor indicates the colour of the rainbow, and the signs + or √ or & represent definite significations.

The very first stage before creation has been said in the Rig Veda तमासीततमसागुह्ममाग्रे very finely translated by Vivekananda as when darkness itself was concealed in darkness—before even darkness was created. This the mind cannot practically conceive. The next stage is :—यदातमसत-तदिवानरात्रिनसतनऽसतशिवएवकेवलः (When there was Tamas—inertia—, when there was no day or night, neither reality nor unreality, and there was only Siva—purity.) This was the egg stage. Curiously in Hindu homes the idol of Siva is never like that of *linga,* but is oval in shape, like an egg, and it is also often so found in temples and open places of worship. It was surely not adopted for convenience, for to shape an oval stone would be as easy as to make a longitudinal one. The phallic shape signifies another aspect of Siva, but the oval could hardly be but to represent the mundane egg.

Hereafter appears the stage of dormant energy, depicted by sleeping Vishnu, lying on the eternal snake, in the ocean of milk (not the colourful and briny sea) too pure and heavy to be affected by the waves of Rajas. He is attended by his consort Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, the assurance that the purpose of creation, of evolution, is final prosperity to all.

From the navel of this dormant energy springs a lotus and Brahma is seated on its petals. Brahma is compared to a potter, who makes vessels, so does Brahma make creation, but is unable to infuse life into it. He has four mouths reciting the Vedas ; but at that time, (as mentioned in the Gita and elsewhere) there were only three Vedas—Atharva Angirasa not being classed as a Veda—so the word Veda means only knowledge, and the four mouths on the four sides indicate only the four sides of the compass. Brahma is reciting knowledge, but the knowledge is from all sides, it is सर्वदेशीय catholic—and not of one groove. The Vedas are held the lower, the mortal, knowledge and not spiritual. Brahma himself is mortal, and is not the son of Vishnu and Lakshmi, but only an emanation of Vishnu and dependent on him.

The creation that he makes is material and the knowledge that he imparts is of the world. Hindu philosophy makes Buddhi mortal and destructible, whilst only Atman is immortal, and it is for this reason that Brahma, one of the highest trinity in Hinduism, finds no worship, although much lower gods are worshipped, for he, all his work, all his knowledge are all mortal, having in them no spirit, which alone is divine.

Besides the recumbent Vishnu there is another representation of Vishnu as a handsome youth, standing poised ready, with a conch, a discus, a club, and a lotus in his four hands. *a* This is the same energy now in action. This Vishnu is the Ishwara, the personal God, the pervader (from Vish to pervade) of the universe, the friend and succourer of all mankind. This is the same Vishnu but now active as Purusha, the Creator. Padma Purana says that Vishnu desirous of creating the world became threefold, Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. Vishnu Purana says that Vishnu is Hiranyagarbha, Hari and Shanker. Markandeya Purana says the three are one.*b*

But what is the nature of this personal God, Vishnu ? It is *Sat-chit-ananda*. The first question which arises about creation is whether there is anything behind creation. Hinduism says there is a Reality behind it ; it is not a mere agglomeration of atoms. It is the one immortal element which will remain when everything would be destroyed, the one stable element behind ever-active change. But again is this Real, जड़, like matter, inert, or has it some intelligence ; is this creation of ours based on some intelligent plan, or is it a concourse of erratic planets and multifarious life-forms, with no order behind them. The reply is that final Reality is Supreme Intelligence also ; it is *chit* as well. But then again to what end are all these worlds rushing, what is the goal of life, is it only annhiliation and death, ending in Mahapralaya,

*a—In some statues Vishnu is shown standing with downcast eyes in meditation This is due to Buddhist influence. A man ready standing with weapons of war in his hands buried deep in Samadhi, is incongruous.

*b (1) From the Hindu Triad, by the Christian Lit. Society

(2) "The Supreme spirit is Vishnu, and Brahma and Siva are also Vishnu". quoted in Indian Philosophy by S Radhakrishnan Vol II p. 686.

or have life and creation some other goal. The final answer is that it is shaping to *ananda,* ultimate joy for all ; behind apparent destruction and death is the goal of welfare and bliss to the whole and to each part. This Vishnu is the final Intelligent Reality which is contriving for the joy of all, for from Vishnu, the abode of bliss, the consort of Lakshmi, was all creation born and to Him will it return. Vishnu is the Supreme Intelligent Reality contriving for the welfare of all, and this is what modern theism as well has concluded for its personal God.*

But giving a name with qualities is not enough ; it has to be endowed with a proper form and functions. The form of Vishnu was carefully thought out and endowed with the highest qualities for a personal God. The figure is that of a youth, in the first flush of growth and is the most appropriate emblem of budding energy. Around the head is a halo of glory, for is He not अदित्यवरणं (the hue of the sun) ; in the Gita, the Virata shape shines as दिविसूर्यसहस्त्रस्यभवेदयुगपदुत्थिता (as if a thousand suns had shone forth simultaneously). On his head is a crown, for He is तमईश्वराणामपरमंमहेश्वरम् (of all Ishwaras thou art the Supremely Highest Ishwara). He looks at you fearlessly, for ब्रह्माऽभयंवै (Brahman is verily fearless), and with Him to help what can there be of fear. He is smiling for He is परमानन्द (supreme joy). Round his neck is the garland of victory, for where He is तत्रश्रीर्विजयोभूतिर्ध्रुवा (there prosperity and victory are sure to ensue). Across his chest is the *yajnopavit,* the sacred thread, for He is शुद्धमापापविद्धम (pure without a touch of sin). These are the highest qualities of the Divine that have been so brought together.

If any further proof were needed that the images of these gods were deliberately designed at the time of Brahminical reconstruction, after Buddha, when the Sutras and the Gita were written, it would be found in the four weapons आयुध of Vishnu, which depict the four functions of an Avatar as laid down in the Gita. In Chapter IV, Krishna

* Modern theism also comes to the same conclusion about the existence of God It says by its cosmological argument that there must be one, eternal, unconditioned, self-existent cause, by teleological argument, that the first cause must be an intelligence, by the ethical argument that the supreme intelligence must be a moral, a beneficent being (From 'The Churches and Modern Thought'' by P Vivian, p 210, alluding to Flint's Theism)

says that "I am revealing to you the ancient knowledge known of old, to Vaivaswan, Manu, and others but now lost in the course of time." As the revealer of true knowledge, as the Divine Teacher, Krishna comes to us in the Gita. A few verses later he says that when there is a decline in Dharma, then he is incarnated, to protect the good, to destroy evildoers, and to re-establish Dharma, or Righteousness. The first आयुध of Vishnu is *Shankh*, a conch shell, and no more appropriate symbol could have been thought out for the function of proclaiming a truth,—the bugle of the herald bringing forth a message from the Divine, and summoning all with a call to action. The next is the discus to destroy the evil—doer, a necessary function for growth ; the third is the mace for the protection of the good, in which is involved the idea of belabouring the attacker as well ; and finally the lotus is the emblem of purity of heart and righteousness. These are the four functions of the Man-Divine, and for all men to follow: —to widely broadcast knowledge, to protect and succour the good, to fight evil, and to establish righteousness. *

Vishnu was designed as the highest and noblest emblem of a personal God, (Ishwara) accessible to human aspirations. He is the only God who incarnates in human shape, who lives as man, and suffers as man and as a God, and comes to man's help when he cries to Him in his extremity. He helps Draupadi when insulted by Duhshasana, comes to the help of even a sparrow whose nest in the grass was in danger of being trampled down in the battle of Mahabharata, and when the elephant, being dragged down into the water by the crocodile, in its very last moment, cries to Him, He, eager to help, rushes down bare-footed, just as he was, without even waiting for Garuda and from afar throws

*—H G Wells, in his "God the Invisible King" Chap V pp 114 to 124 defines the new conception of a personal God as held by the rising generation "The conception of a young and energetic God an Invisible prince growing in strength and wisdom, who calls men and women to his service and who gives salvation from self and mortality only through self-abandonment to his service . The first purpose of God is the attainment of clear knowledge, of knowledge as a means to more knowledge, and of knowledge as a means to power. .. God fights against death in every form, against the great death of the race, against the petty death of indolence, insufficiency, baseness, misconception, and perversion ..... God is courage God is courage beyond any conceivable suffering......We of the new faith, repudiate the teaching of non-resistance We are the militant followers and participators in a militant God.... .(we) must needs be equally ready and willing.... .to do our utmost to increase order and clearness, to fight against indolence, waste, disorder, cruelty, vice and every form of his and our enemy death .....and to bring about the establishment of his real and visible kingdom throughout the world" *Q* ? Is it not Vishnu incarnating in the minds of the west ?

his discus and severs the crocodile's head and saves the elephant. So to every living being, whether a man, or a bird, or a beast, who appeals to Him in his trouble, with purity in heart and with firm faith, now and throughout ages past and yet to come, has His helping hand been always extended—so merciful, so eager to help, is He.

There is another emblem of Vishnu, often represented in images, the sign of the foot of Bhrigu on his chest. It is stated that Bhrigu was deputed by the Gods to find who was the highest among the gods. He went and spoke insultingly to Brahma and Mahadeva who both got angry with him. He then went to Vishnu, who was then asleep. Bhrigu kicked Vishnu on the chest reviling him at not rising to give honour and welcome to him. Vishnu getting up most humbly apologised and caught hold of Bhrigu's foot expressed regret for the hurt which the foot must have sustained. The gods unanimously gave Vishnu the highest place. He takes no offence so long as you insult or injure Him, the most merciful and forgiving of gods, but woe to you if you injure any other innocent being in his creation—the discus is always ready for the unjust and the oppressor.

The idea of God should be such as to meet the religious needs of all kinds of people Hinduism has provided such an ideal in Vishnu. Replete with highest qualities and functions, He satisfies as an idol the needs of a semi-intelligent man who finds his goal through the worship of material objects ; as an incarnation to him who seeks it through the highest type of humanity ; as a God to him who would conceive of Him through the highest qualities in his own heart ; and as the Supreme Energy to the philosopher who would satisfy his intelligent needs as well.

Vishnu's consort is Lakshmi, the giver of prosperity of all kinds. If we would in life get prosperity to dwell in our homes we should wed our hearts to Vishnu. His *Vahan* (vehicle) is not the slow-moving,

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*..... Hinduism emphasises renunciation, but of the heart, renunciation from the world was probably due to priestly and Buddhistic influence Wealth is a form of power, like learning and bodily strength, it can be used for good as for evil purposes Rama and Krishna, highest among men as Avatars, and far higher than Rishis, were not recluses, nor were Janaka, Harishchandra, and many others

inoffensive elephant, horse, or bull, it is the eagle, swift on its broad pinions, fierce with its strong keen beak and talons, and its regal mien with its far-seeing eyes.

*........The eagle has more kingly and martial qualities than any other animal or bird. The ancients glorified it. It was the emblem of Babylonia, Syria, the ancient Persians, Ptolemies of Egypt and Heliopolis, and it was also the Roman Bird, the bird of Jove. Even in modern times, Russia, Austria, Germany, France, and America, have the eagle as their emblem of power

CHAPTER VI.

SIVA

Brahma is the maker, Vishnu the preserver and Siva is called the destroyer of creation. But Siva is not such a simple figure. Siva has been given five characters :—(1) The Destroyer, called Rudra, Mahakala, etc. (2) The Reproductive Power of Nature, called Pitr, Matri, Sarvabhavakara, etc ; as the giver of blessings he is Siva and Sankara, (3) The Ascetic, called Mahayogi ; the naked, called Digambara, (4) The learned Sage, knower of the Vedas, called Pandit, Mantravid. (5) The Lord of Dancers, Nataraj, Natesvara. The Rudraksha berries which have five divisions or mouths are sacred to him ; he himself has five mouths as Panchanana.

The chief characteristic of Siva is that of the Destroyer. When the Mahapralaya comes, Siva's third eye blazes out, fire bursts forth all around, worlds crash into one another, universes are destroyed and all that exists is reduced to ashes ; nothing escapes death, not even the kingdoms of the gods, or the gods themselves. Siva is the over-lord of the god of death, Yama, with his terrible noose. Siva has been depicted with all the fearful external emblems of death He has garlands of skulls around his neck ; his body is smeared with the ashes of the dead ; huge poisonous snakes adorn him as ornaments ; *bhang*, *dhatura* and poisons are his diet ; ghosts, goblins and demons attend him ; and he himself wields the heavy fatal trident, and it was he who drank off the all-consuming poison which the gods had churned out of the ocean. No more fearful imagery of death than this could be symbolised.

But Hinduism says that death is not the final word in life ; the cycle of creation goes on, birth follows death and autumn is but the messenger of spring. And it is not as death but as *linga*, the repro-

*A........From Siva Bhakti, by J N Murdoch Chris Lit Society

ductive power, that Siva is worshipped. He is attended by the bull ; from his head rises the Ganges, the fertiliser ; and above him on the sky is the new moon—the message of a new glorious growth. When Siva drank the poison it did not go below the throat, leaving unaffected the heart, the vital portion, and in this is the hope of humanity that in us is the Divine which is the conqueror of death.

Life follows death, and from death springs new life ; so that through it all runs the dance of cosmic energy. Siva, the emblem of death, as of life, as Natesvara, pervades all this ever-changing universe. Earl of Ronaldshay, in his "The Heart of Aryavarta" (p. 13), writes that to the Indian the Nataraja, is the plastic presentation of a whole philosophy ; the whirl of the dance is the energy of the universe. He quotes Dr. Coomaraswamy who says "no artist of to-day, however great, could more exactly, or more wisely create an image of energy which science must postulate behind all phenomena" ; it is "a synthesis of of science, religion and art".

Behind this whirl of plastic circumstance, the ebb and flow of changing creation, there is peace at the heart of it all. Death may be levying its horrid toll, new life may come only through pain and tribulation, and the whole of life may be as unstable as water on the lotus leaf ; but behind these all is the peace of God,—all is well with the world. Siva is in his Kailas, amidst the silence of the pure snows, sitting absorbed in the ecstatic calm of Samadhi. Both he and Vishnu, asleep on the *Shesha-Nag*, convey the assurance that *ananda* and peace are at the beginning and at the end of creation, and so consequently peace must also in reality be at the heart of this tumultuous ocean of life.

The aspect of knowledge (as of *chit* in Vishnu) is delineated in Siva as the great teacher. He knows all : the beginning and end of creation. Ravana learned the Vedas from him, and most Hindu relig-

*........ Sir R G Bhandarkar, in his Vaishnavism, p 115 says that no trace of *linga* or phallic worship is found in the earlier literature, the first mention of it is in the Mahabharata (Anushasana Parva 14).

NOTE —The *sisne devah* (phallic gods) in the Rig Veda were of non-Aryans The above also shows that this function and symbol was allotted to Siva at the period of Brahminic reconstruction

ious books are described as the dialogue between Siva and his consort. Siva is Panchanana. To the material knowledge of Brahma with his four mouths, Siva adds the fifth, the supreme or the spiritual knowledge.

Siva at the highest is the Nirguna Brahmana ; he is the cosmic energy creating, running and destroying creation, and then re-creating it again, and is the same Siva as is symbolised in the mundane egg. All that exists, whether good or bad, is based on this force ; it is non-selective. Siva is the force of the universe, who must sustain and help all, for all are his children and worshippers ; but Vishnu is the moral force, the god within us, to enable us to grow pure and to rise to the highest within us. Siva is called औघड़दानी, the indiscriminate generous donor. Ravana and the Rakshasas were his worshippers and obtained boons from him ; but Rama also worshipped him and got his aid. Both the Kauravas and the Pandavas were alike favoured by him. Even Rakshasas with the avowed purpose of fighting gods worshipped him, and Siva, even knowing this, was forced by their austerities to grant them boons. With him there is no good or bad, for they are all his creatures ; wine, meat, and other rites, held usually degrading, are offered to him and his consort, Kali. The good worshipped him but the Thugs also offered their victims to him.

Siva like nature is erratic, somewhere unduly generous and fertile, at others barren and injurious ; but ascetic exercises, hard labour, will even force his hands. Vishnu, on the other hand, is equipoised, and wants only purity of heart, faith and love.

तुलशीदलपात्रेण जलस्यचुलुकेनच
विक्रीणीतेस्वमात्मानंभक्तेभ्योभक्तवत्सलः

(The Lover of his devotees has sold himself to his worshippers for even a leaf of the Tulsi plant and a handcupful of water.)

Siva may be invoked to harm others, but Vishnu and Lakshmi never. Both Siva and Vishnu are immortal, and the image of Hari-Har combines the cosmic and the personal god. But Brahma, being mortal, has no joint figure with either Vishnu or Siva except in the Trimurti.

But how is the soul to wed Siva, the Divine ? Not by rituals and sacrifices. Uma's story signifies this and the sacrifice ends in failure. Daksha, the chief sacrificer of the gods, is in contempt given the head of a goat, the usual animal of sacrifice. Parvati, the daughter of the pure snow-mantled Himalayas wins him by love, faith and devotion. She is the chief object of worship by women as the emblem of purity and of the love of the wife for the husband. The main characteristics of Siva are also represented in his consort. As Durga she is the mother to whom all her children, whether good or bad, are dear. *a*

कुपुत्रोजायतेक्वचिदपिकुमातानभवति

(An unworthy son may be born, but there is never an unworthy mother.)

As Kali, she is the Destroyer. She is Sundari, for nature to the seer in all her aspects is beautiful.

The highest worldly desire for a Hindu is to have a son, to continue his line. So the most valuable things we can ask for from Siva are represented in his sons. Kartikeya represents material worldly power and conquest. He is the commander of the army of the gods and is shown as a young man gorgeously dressed, wearing bright ornaments, sword in hand, mounted on the vain peacock. Ganesh denotes wisdom, but is an incongruous figure. A man with a large head is considered wise, *b* so he is given the head of an elephant, the most intelligent and large-headed among animals. Ganesh has but one tusk—the one-pointed way of the wise ; his weapon is the *ankus* (the goad) not a weapon of destruction, but to stir one up to greater efforts. His large belly signifies contentment ; he is satisfied with very little, having only a small *laddoo* sweet in his hands. His mount is the small humble rat ; for humility is the chief adornment of wisdom. The elephant is also slow-moving, conservative, making sure of one step and then putting the other. The whole impression of the figure of Ganesh, taking no notice of the apparent incongruities, is that of a person substantial and wise, who would not be hurried, but moving slowly, iperturbably, but irresistibly along a well-thought-out course.

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*a.. .. ..From Shankara's hymn to Durga.

*b.............There is a Hindi saying सिर बड़ा सरदारका (A man with a large head is a chief)

A legend says that both Kartikeya and Ganesh wanted to marry two beautiful sisters, Siddhi and Buddhi, (success and wisdom). The sisters made a condition that they would marry whoever of the two would make the quickest round of the world. Kartikeya flew away on his peacock. Ganesh wrote the word Rama (the Divine) on the ground and mounting his rat went round the writing, and was adjudged the winner. Wisdom is always of more worth than even the conquest of the whole world. Ganesh is wisdom personified. In every ceremony Ganesh is first worshipped; no venture should be commenced without seeking the direction of true wisdom. Ganesh is installed on the doors of all houses; may wisdom inhabit inside it. Ganesh is called Vighnesha, the remover of obstacles. Time after time in its concept of the Divine and in the ideas of its gods, Hinduism asserts the greatness of intelligence and wisdom. At the head of every book, at the beginning of the day's lesson, is the name of Ganesh written, emphasizing the need of the use of wisdom in all actions:—of clear, sober, one-pointed, discerning reason, the highest gift of God to man.

CHAPTER VII

INCARNATIONS

It is said by other religions that God sent down periodically His messengers to mankind. Hinduism cannot say this, for all creation, in its final reality, is nothing but a manifestation of the divine, so God cannot send some one who is apart from Him. Everything that exists every one who is born, is in some measure an incarnation of Him; in some the light is shining more brightly, in others veiled more or less by human passions. It is said that the theory of incarnations was first introduced after Buddhism, when Buddhists, relying on the theory that every man must have had previous birth, held that Buddha had been born numerous times before, in different cycles of time. Hinduism as a reply invented its incarnations and included in them the names of its greatest men.

It is usually said that there have been nine avatars and a tenth is to come hereafter. But in naming them all the Puranas vary and the number also varies, and also as to which was a full and which a partial avatar. The Bhagwat says that there were twenty-two avatars and later on adds that they were innumerable, अवताराह्यसंख्येया, including gods, saints, etc. The oldest tradition about consecutive avatars is in the Mahabharata, which must have been based on the ideas of the originators of the avatar theory; and it mentions the Hansa, Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Narsingh, Vaman, Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, and Kalki avatars. Later writers made changes in them; some added Balarama and Buddha; but as Buddha himself denies a personal God, his inclusion is incongruous. Just as Buddha was included to placate Buddhists, so probably Balarama and Lakshman were made avatars of *Shesha-nag* to satisfy snake worshippers. In recent times Chaitanya was called an avatar of Krishna, one Muuralia Goshain of Poona an avatar

of Ganesh, Nimbarka of the Sudarshana Chakra, Madhavacharya of Vayu, and Arjun of Vishnu, and so on. Going back to the oldest list of avatars as given in the Mahabharata, it seems that the Brahminic reorganizers framed their theory of the evolution of man and of civilisation, and expressed it in the sequence of Avatars. The other additions are of a later date.

The first avatar is that of Hansa, which in Sanskrit means the swan, but also means pure ; and the spirit, which is pure white as the swan, flies away to its celestial home after a man's death. The meaning of Hansa avatar was that at first there was only the spirit and nothing material, or as is also said in the Bible about creation,—the spirit moved upon the face of the waters.

The next stage was the creation of water and of all manner of creatures that lived in water. This is typified by the fish avatar.

Slowly some sort of earth appeared and amphibious animals were evolved ; and the tortoise represents this stage.

Later on earth began to solidify, low forms of vegetation began to grow on its surface, and marshy animals were born ; the boar avatar depicts this.

Gradually higher types of animals had to evolve and the first rudiments of man had to appear, and had of necessity to be half man and half animal, with the dawning intelligence of man and the passions and the appetite of the beast. This was represented as the Narsingh avatar.

All these avatars were in the Sat Yuga and show the evolution of creation till the time that real man was born. A new epoch now begins with the birth of man, an intelligent reasoning creature. He was not yet full-grown to man's stature, and he is represented as a dwarf, Vaman. He, by his intelligence, drives Bali (force) and his ferocious Asuras, the lowest types, from power, and asserts his own dominance. This is typified by the three steps of Vaman, when he takes possession of the

world as man's domain, the idea being taken from the Vedas, where Vishnu, the sun, in his three steps of morning, noon and evening, conquers the whole visible world.

The next stage is that of the savage, whose hand is against every one else, and who has to maintain his living by continual fighting, and whose one delight is incessant fight and the one ambition to annihilate the enemy off the face of the earth. This is shown in Parasurama, who exterminated the Kshattriyas twenty-one times, leaving no male child alive to carry on the descent. Man had by this discovered the use of metal, and Parasurama's adze conquers the cruder weapons of his enemies. The people lived in forests and their chief wealth was cattle and Parasurama's quarrel arose over the theft of a favourite cow. Force and a constant fear of the weapon was the one authority recognised.

Civilisation slowly opened; man came to recognise that it was wiser to conquer and to use the former enemy as a vassal than to exterminate him. Rama kills Bali and Ravana, but makes their successors his loyal and obedient subjects. Agriculture has been introduced and Rama marries Sita, the daughter of the furrow. The bow and its metal-tipped arrow has been evolved and deals destruction from a distance even with the striker sitting in a covert concealed from view. *a* Instead of perpetually warring small clans comes the rule of one king, who settles their disputes, protects the people, keeps order in his dominions and people flourish and multiply. The king's will, right or wrong, is law. At the worst it is one man tyranny; at the best Rama-Rajya famed in song and story, when under an ideal king, peace and blessings overspread the land.

All these later avatars were of the Treta Yuga, and based on imaginary or mythological stories. The next is Dwapar Yuga introducing historical characters verifiable from contemporaneous sources.

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a. .... . C. C Vaidya says in "The Riddle of the Ramayana' (p 83) that Vishnu is called the youngest or last of the gods and his great weapon was the bow and arrows, which was a great advance on previous weapons Indra had a Vajra, a kind of javelin, Varuna a *Pasha* or noose, Siva the *Sula* or trident The Taitt Aranyaka says that a bow was produced from the left hand of Vishnu and arrows from his right hand Muir (Sans Text Vol IV) shows how Vishnu with his bows and arrows became the greatest of gods

NOTE —Vishnu has no bow and arrows now This shows that the four weapons of Vishnu were intentionally introduced in him later and the bow and arrows given to Rama, his avatar

The story of Krishna is a part of India's history. He has been made an avatar to typify another stage of growth in civilisation. Up to this time the king was above law, but Krishna brings the reign of Dharma, the law of righteousness, above the king's will. The might of irresponsible rulers had to be checked at whatever cost and that of Right introduced, even if it leads to the holocaust of Mahabharata, even if Aryan growth suffers an apparent check. The avatar is for the establishment of Dharma, for the enforcement of right in dealings above all considerations,—as even the best of kings might suffer lapses. The king of the Pandavas, Yudhishtira, is called Dharma Raja.

The final avatar, Kalki, is yet to come, and voices a higher hope,—the kingdom of God on earth. The new avatar will be born of Brahmin parents (not Kshattriya, with the tradition of force behind them), have a flaming sword in his hand and shall come to usher in the reign of Sat Yuga, the reign of Sat, or truth. Hereafter men will do right, not under the fear of the king, nor the compulsion of law, but of their own nature, when truth, becoming its own unerring guide, shall be followed simply because it is truth, where purity, honesty and truth will be natural to man, and to act against them contrary to his own instincts. When Satya shall reign, then shall the divine that is in man slowly begin to shine forth.

CHAPTER VIII

RAMA

Rama's story is one of our two great epics, and Rama is worshipped by millions of Hindus. But the Valmiki Ramayana has not the same manly appeal as the Mahabharata, and is held to be the work of later unskilled priests. The Ramayana as it exists to-day is full of interpollations and additions, so that it is hard to find the true stature of Rama.

Vyasa's Mahabharata had originally about 9000 verses and was called Jaya. Later on a new recension was called the Bharata, and the latest of over a lakh of verses has the prefix of Maha added to it; but there have been all along continual interpollations. The Ramayana must have been a story framed by Valmiki on the basis of the historical figure of Rama to convey some special message of Valmiki's. The original story is lost. Thereafter some recensions of it must have been made, every time changing and elaborating it; and the present Valmiki Ramayana is the last of them and is believed to have been written about 200 B.C. Behind the present version we have to find the Rama as had been first laid down by Valmiki, and not Rama as an Avatar of Vishnu which is a post-Buddhistic creation. Just as old broken idols worshipped as village gods have often been found by archaeologists to be historical images, so behind Rama, the Avatar, has to be found the Rama of Valmiki.

There are various stories of Rama besides that of the Valmiki—in the Ramopakhyana of the Mahabharata, in Jain books and in the Buddhist Jatakas,—all differing in many particulars. Even the present Valmiki has three recensions, the Bengal, Kashi and Bombay, and one-third of the verses in each are not found in the others.

The Buddhist story makes of Rama an anchorite, and describes the banishment, but has no mention in it of Sita's abduction or of Ravana, for the Buddhist could not of course glorify the carnage at Lanka; Rama hears unmoved of the death of his father, for to an ascetic life and death are the same ; after the fourteen years' exile Rama returns and is crowned along with Sita, (for no Buddhist ascetic could have a wife). Just as Buddhists made of Rama a celibate and an ascetic to suit their religious beliefs, so was Rama made an Avatar by Vaishnavas and the tale moulded accordingly. Behind the various stories by various authors and sects we have to find the real Rama, not by what others say, but from his own actions, for they will speak truer than all these self-interested story-tellers.

Rama lived after Rig-Vedic times, when Aryans had penetrated only so far as Koshala and Videha, as no definite geography of Southern India, except the name of Lanka, is mentioned in the Ramayana, but as is given in the Mahabharata. The highest type of people living there were the Aryans, next to them were the Asuras, probably a a branch of the Aryans but antagonistic to the main branch. They had large cities, a high stage of civilisation and must have had the same religion, for Ravana was the worshipper of Siva, whom Rama also worshipped, and he is acknowledged the greatest commentator of the Vedas ; possibly they were a southern branch of the Aryans, who had accepted aboriginal gods and rites, something like the ancient Persians but closer than them,—whose god Ahura was the Asura of the Aryan, and the deva of the Aryan was the devil of the Persians whilst Indra was a demon. There were also the aborigines, known as the ape-men, the bear-men, the bird-men (the Jatayus), probably from their totems, (a relic of which we find in the Mahabharata (Gita, 1. 20.) where Arjuna is called as Arjuna of the ape-flag). These were primitive forest-men living in dense jungles, whose only weapon was a club and who had not till then come into contact with Aryans. It is significant that whilst Rama is depicted as carrying bows and arrows, Hanuman and Angada have only clubs. They had probably a tradition of building, something like the cave-men, for Nala and Nila were the architects of the

sea-bridge. In the Mahabharata a similar forest-man comes out when the Khandava forest is burned, and designs and makes the palace of Yudhishtira. This was the state of society when the original story of Rama was first compiled.

The cause of Rama's incarnation was said to be to protect Brahmins in their sacrifices and to rid the earth of the burden of the evil Rakshasas. Valmiki was originally of low caste and rose to the elevation of a Brahminic Rishi, which must have been despite some opposition of the Brahmins, by sheer merit and learning. It could hardly have come from him to extol Brahminic privilege of birth and to run down the lower castes to which he, his family and relatives all belonged. The Ramayana of Valmiki was in reality one of the greatest attacks against Brahminic assumptions of greatness, but which has in the whirligig of time been turned into one of its chief supports. His Ramayana is a strong attack against all privilege, whether of mere learning, caste or even sex. The Ramayana has some historical basis, but the whole was a deliberately planned story, and a certain proportion of the characters is imaginary, being introduced to further the progress of the plot.

The story begins by the accidental killing by Dasharatha, when out deer-hunting, of a Brahmin youth and is cursed, for his carelessness and sin, to die of a broken heart in old age in bereavement of his son. If the event is purely imaginary, it is hard to understand why the youth was made a Brahmin ; and if he was a Brahmin, Dasharatha was let off with an exceedingly light punishment for Brahma-hatya (the killing of a Brahmin). He was not outcasted, had to perform no terrible penances, but was merely told that thirty or forty years later he would die over the grief of a son. Obviously Valmiki begins his story with an attack on Brahmins and their self-assumed importance.

When Rama is placed for training it is not with the venerable Brahmin Vasishta, but with Vishwamitra, who had formerly been a Kshattriya and rose to Brahminhood by merit.

In his first battle Rama is made to kill a woman, Taraka, whilst the man escapes with a slight wound. This appears hardly chivalrous for a great hero, but Valmiki emphatically asserts that a person must be judged strictly in accordance to his actions without any regard to his caste or sex. He has no false sentimentality at all ; an evil-doer must be punished whoever he be.

In his way to Mithila, Rama effects a reconciliation between Gautama and his wife Ahalya, whom the former had discarded for misconduct. Valmiki would apply the same standard of morality for men as for women, and has much charity for such marital lapses.

Rama is married to Sita, a handsome accomplished girl of unknown parentage found discarded in the fields. Rama shows a total disregard of caste restrictions in marriage which Rajput princes who take pride in their descent from Rama and other Hindus have yet far to follow.

At this juncture Parasurama is dragged in quite irrelevantly, is made to act the buffoon, is disgraced and sent away. There was no necessity for his coming, the episode does not advance the story in the slightest. It seems that he, the only Brahminic Avatar, had been deliberately and maliciously introduced, by non-Brahmin Valmiki, to deride and pull down Brahminic self-conceit. An incarnation means God himself born for some particular purpose, and as such Parasurama was hardly inferior to Rama and there was no reason why he should be dragged in and debased. In fact Valmiki, besides his attack on Brahminisim, attacks the principle for which Parasurama stood—the annihilation of the entire enemy population. Rama kills only Ravana and those Rakshasas who were actually fighting ; after Ravana's death the remaining combatants and the civil population were not in the least molested. The disgrace of Parasurama is the disgrace of an ideal and the termination of an epoch.

It is said that Dasharatha begot his sons when he was growing on in age, so he must have been quite old when Rama, at twenty-nine

years of age, was going to be installed regent. A very serious question arises as to how far Rama was right in obeying the wish of his father for banishment, which was decidedly unfair, inspired by a jealous step-mother in fulfilment of an indefinite promise made at least thirty years ago, i. e. before the birth of Rama Unfortunately, his example, this blind obedience to a nearly senile parent's whim does deprive in certain cases young Hindus of all initiative and adventure and keeps them tied to their mothers' apron strings. Whenever a young man wants to strike out a line for himself away from home, old age objects and enforces blind obedience by citing Rama's example. Hinduism gives a clear and definite answer to unjust orders,—they must not be obeyed. Prahlada would not obey his father ; Vibhishan discarded his elder brother, and would be no party to an injustice ; Rohita, in the story of Sunehshepa in the Rig-Veda, would not let himself be offered as a sacrifice in fulfilment of his father's vow to the gods, and after the attempted sacrifice Sunehshepa discarded his father and became the adopted son of his uncle Vishwamitra ; Bharata would not obey his mother and sit on Rama's throne ; Rukmini would not marry whom her father elected and Krishna killed his own unjust maternal uncle, Kansa.

Rama, from the very day of his birth as a Hindu son, had gained a definite right in the kingdom, which Dasharatha could not divest him of, and Rama could have insisted on it. In fact Dasharatha himself implores Rama to place him, Dasharatha, in prison and to mount the throne. Rama takes his stand on the high principle of Truth, a promise once voluntarily made must be kept ; Rama could not advise that length of time had barred it, or that circumstances alter the case. Dasharatha had given the promise and Rama would help him, all he can, to keep it, so he himself promises to go in exile. Later on when Bharata, after the king's death, beseeches Rama to return and rule in Ajodhya, Rama refuses. His promise was not made so much to Dasharatha as to the God within his own self, and the rule of God was, certainly, not over.

Valmiki gives a very high place to his female characters,—to Sita, Kausalya, Mandodari, but he has no false sentiment. Taraka is killed

for being a brigand, and the nose of Surpanakha is cut off for her wantonness and for trying to kill Sita.

Then Sita is abducted. Rama had three alternatives. He could, as a high class Kshattriya, have said that once a woman has gone into the possession of another person she is of no use to him, and have discarded her. Or he could have sent word to Bharata and Janaka and they would have come with heavy forces to enforce her restitution. But he chose a course doomed to failure, by all laws of probability and commonsense. Nowhere in world's history is such an example of two young men, seeking no outside aid, and by their own initiative, resourcefulness, daring and persistence, within one year, despite tremendous odds and obstacles, defeating such a powerful enemy, and subjugating two kingdoms.

Rama meets Sugriva and kills Bali. A great stain attaches to Rama's knightly career for killing Bali from a covert and not facing him in the open boldly. There are two pertinent points which have to be considered. The first is that these ape-men knew only the use of clubs, or rather of branches of trees as weapons, as is proved by the images of Hanuman, etc.; in the actual fight itself it is said that Sugriva and Bali fought with fists, blows and with trees plucked out, and there is no mention of the use of bows, arrows or swords. The next is that Sugriva cannot believe that Rama can kill Bali until Rama convinces him by piercing seven palms with one arrow; to Sugriva it was probably as wonderful and inconceivable as the gun to the primeval savage. Rama convinced him that what could go through a tree could go through Bali's body however valiant he be. Bali was a huge giant of a wild man, who had once, probably in some wrestling match, picked up Ravana and had walked away tucking him under his arms. His name, Bali, denotes his great strength. To have faced him on foot would not only have been foolish, but probably fatal. Suppose Rama, delicate, city-bred, with his first shot or two had only wounded him, Bali rushing at Rama would have pounded him to a pulp, he would not have left Rama even if Rama had fallen down wounded. The fight with Ravana

was a fight with men of Aryan civilisation. Lakshman was wounded and was left lying to be carried away later. Neither the Aryans nor the Rakshasas killed foes who fell down wounded on the ground, nor was it so in the Mahabharata. This was not to be expected of Bali. To think that Rama would have despatched him with only one arrow-shot is futile, neither Ravana, Kumbhakarna, or Meghnada were so easily disposed off, otherwise the battle would have been finished in a few hours ; they are depicted as being wounded over and over again,—their bodies, it is said, spurted out streams of blood from arrow-wounds and looked like huge mountains decorated with numerous gushing streams. Arjuna with his Gandiva bow could not despatch Bhishma with one arrow, he had to complete the arrow couch ; the other warriors in the Mahabharata did not fall so easily. Rama dealt with Bali as men do to-day, with all their high velocity rifles, with tigers and wild elephants,—shoot them from machans or safe coverts. Even to-day civilised troops, facing savages armed with poisoned arrows and assegais, shoot them long before they come within striking distance. Rama was not very keen to kill Bali thus. The first day when Sugriva had a chance of running away, he did nothing ; the next day when it was either Bali's life or Sugriva's, he killed Bali without rising from his seat and in doing so would have impressed Sugriva and his followers tremendously. Rama had a long mission before him and in war as elsewhere, wisdom is always better than foolhardinesss.

Ravana was a highly descended Brahmin, a deep Bhakta of Siva, and a profound scholar whose commentary of the Vedas stands unmatched. Valmiki, purposely, makes of him a Rakshasa, the chief of evil men. Men are to be judged not merely by their worship, or their learning, or their birth, but by their actions. Want of proper actions drags a man down however great he be otherwise. Degrading the high Ravana he raises the aborigine, Hanuman, for his loyalty, sincerity and service.

Valmiki had composed his Ramayana long before the Brahminic theory, that Rama had incarnated solely to rid the world of the Rakshasas. Rama does not appear eager to perform this duty. For the first thirteen years of his exile he did nothing towards it, and in the

last year he is constantly asking Ravana, right to the end, to return him his Sita and he would go back quietly to Ajodhya. To him the chief concern is the restoration of Sita and not the killing of Rakshasas.

Rama goes back and is crowned. Then occurs the dark episode of the banishment of Sita, an episode so degrading and cruel that even his greatest Bhakta, Tulshi Dass, was forced to leave it out of his Ramayana, and which has greatly lowered the position of Hindu womanhood. Rama hears from a Dhobi allegations against Sita, and though personally convinced of her chastity, turns her out, and would thereafter have nothing to do with her.

Let us examine Rama's conduct. The Dhobi represents public opinion, even though of a very low class of people. And what should Rama have done? Should he have asked Sita to go again through the ordeal by fire, a terrible test; but the people apparently did not believe in it, although there was the whole army to testify to it. He could ignore the calumny, for his own conscience was clear about her; let dogs bark and in a short while it would die a natural death. Or like a strong king he could get the Dhobi thrashed, or put into goal, or even have his head taken off, and people would be afraid of slandering a virtuous lady. He did none of these things; he quietly sent away Sita with Lakshman to a forest retreat close to a colony of Rishis.

Men have willingly undergone martyrdom for some cause dear to their heart. They were asked by the ruling power to recant their theories, or to suffer torture and death; they chose the latter, to undergo the supreme agony for a moment or an hour, rather than face the ridicule of their companions, and to remain in disgrace and scorn for the rest of their lives.

To Rama there was no such compelling necessity. But he had higher obligations. He was born and anointed a king, he had undertaken certain duties and could not shirk them. For a principle he had undertaken the fourteen years' exile. To him his wife was exceedingly dear; she for his love had gone through tremendous troubles, and his war with Ravana was simply for her return. It was terribly cruel to

have exiled her for no fault of hers, for a baseless calumny, so soon after their return. To him Ahalya, Mandodari, Tara, Ruma (wife of Sugriva), were all good women and fit to be good wives. But he was king of Ajodhya and in that little clan, a woman, like Caesar's wife, must be above suspicion. If he was to be their king, and he could not, like lesser mortals, run away from his post of duty as the anointed king of Ajodhya, he must follow their principles and traditions; must be even the king in setting the highest example, even if his heart breaks, his life is ruined, and he suffers agonies. He makes a sacrifice which has no parallel in history.

For what did he do it ? For wealth, power, and glory, to extend his kingdom, for personal pleasures, or for even the pleasure of the gods? Wealth, power and glory had no attractions for Rama. Even in youth, when these things have their greatest lure, he had with a light heart discarded all the joys of kingdom and the pomp of power, and gladly taken to a rigorous life for fourteen years ; he gave away the kingdoms of Lanka and Aranyaka to Vibhishan and to Sugriva. To him a hut with Sita would have been pleasure enough, worth more than all the glories of Koshala. To a Hindu to have sons who would offer him oblations after death is a religious necessity ; till then Rama had no sons, and in exiling Sita he forsook his hopes of the hereafter. What pleasure had there been so far in life for him, in the dreary years in the hard forest ; and what would there be now in the drearier days of the empty gem-studded halls of the palaces in Ajodhya, or the vacant poignant nights. And all this was assumed by him of his own free and voluntary act,—a whole life widowed of pleasure, comfort and marital companionship, and the giving of mortal pain to her whom he loved more than life itself, —all in following a higher call. Rama more than any one else embodies the ideal of renunciation, not of retired bodily asceticism, but renunciation of the spirit, when everything that a mortal holds dear is discarded in following what one holds the Highest.

नकर्मणानप्रजयानधनेनत्यागेनैकेनामृतत्वमानशुः (Keval. Up. I. 1.)

(Not by deed, not by progeny, not by wealth, but only by renunciation, does one gain immortality.)

CHAPTER IX

KRISHNA

Krishna presents a very complex personality, so that it is hard to find the real truth about him. People go so far as to say that the lives of several persons have been incorporated in the ordinary conception of Krishna. It is said that the Bhagvad Gita is a composition of some late Vaishnava Rishi, a follower of the Sattwata sect, a worshipper of the mythical Krishna, and his composition was interpolated in the Mahabharata as a part of the book. It is one of the numerous interpolations in that vast cyclopedic work which contains other similar Gitas—the Anu Gita and the Sanatsu Gita. The whole of the Bhagvad Gita is revered by Hindus as containing the teaching of Krishna; but as the entire Mahabharata of Vyasa was originally of about 9000 verses it is unbelievable that the present Gita of 700 verses as it stands to-day could have formed part of it. The historical Krishna is pointed out to be of quite a different type—a helper of the Pandavas and a clever, unscrupulous politician who through his crooked devices helped them to win the battle. The earlier portion of the Mahabharata also does not give him high divine honours. In addition to these two, there are three Puranic conceptions. The first is the cowherd who plays his pranks with other boys and who is the killer of Kansa. The other is the flute-player, the lover of Radha and the Gopies with a tale of immoralities. The last is the concept of baby Krishna in the arms of Yashoda, or crawling on the ground. The last idea, it is said, has been borrowed from Christianity with its adoration of the Madonna and the Child; no mention of such worship is found in the earlier Hindu books, the earliest being long after the second century when Christianity was first introduced in India. The mind gets lost to find the real Krishna out of this maze of contradicting personalities.

The worship of the baby as the freshest from his divine home had been common to many religions even before the birth of Christ, as in the worship of the child Buddha, and of Horus, the child of Isis. The worship of Krishna as the beloved of Radha is only a recent cult; no description of it is found in the earliest Puranas, which give just some mention of the dances of Krishna with some girls. Later worshippers kept on continually enlarging it until it finds its culmination in the lascivious verses of the recent writers. It is really the allegorical description of the human soul yearning for the love of its Divine mate. The name of Radha is a very late introduction and the word itself means a worshipper.*a As for the immoralities they are the products of libidinous imaginations. According to the Bhagwat itself Krishna was twelve years of age when he killed Kansa and he must have been younger in the days of the Ras. The stories of wholesale love and immoralities are sheer imagination. It is said that all the women in Brindadan, without exception, were mad with the sexual love of Krishna, the girls, the mothers, the aunts, the grand-mothers, and among them must of course have been his mother Yashoda, aunt Rohini, and sister Subhadra. It has only to be stated in plain hard words to show its ridiculousness.*b The above two ideas of the baby and the lascivious youth, both born of worshippers' brains, to satisfy the appeal of the emotions, have to be left out in conceiving the real Krishna, and in finding his real greatness, if any.

*a..One of the meanings of Krishna is-the attractor, from Krish-to draw

*b..The ancient Hindus with their usual thoroughness analysed the various relations which the human heart holds with the Divine There is the notion of the vengeful and stern judge, as Jehovah or Yama, the partial and merciful judge, as Allah, then there are various other concepts which try to bring the heart in more and more loving relationship and greater self-surrender in the ideas of God as king, father, mother, son, husband etc The Hindus have classified them according to the ardour they produce in the heart of the devotee, as the chief essential is Bhakti The keenest love they deduce to be that of a married woman to her paramour The heart of the woman is burning with love but she has to conceal the fire although being consumed inwardly, and while doing the daily work of the world does not lose thought even for a moment of her beloved She is also trying her hardest to maintain her hold over him by the intensity of her love, lest at the slightest slackness he wander away elsewhere, for her sole hold over him is her love, her's is not the love of the wife who is sure and hence careless of the husband She is nursing this love which she knows might, if discovered, bring all her life to ruin, and knowing all this she would consider all well lost if she could only gain him This idea has been typified in the love of Radha. To make the love still more ardent the form of Krishna has been designed of an alluring loveliness and the flute is the sweet call to the soul to forsake all and to go to him The Divine gives one glimpse and then conceals himself, the heart becomes consumed and remains burning for love, and then the message comes from Mathura, "It is only in the world after this will you really get your beloved"

The whole story is an allegory but produces such a consuming love as no other concept can give.

The greatest glory of historical Krishna is held to be in the teaching of the Gita and in the winning of the Mahabharata for the Pandavas, who with their seven legions defeated the eleven legions and the veteran leaders of Kauravas. Krishna is eulogised as the embodiment of victory and of the victory of Dharma. Let us see into this. Let us go back to the time when Krishna on waking sees Arjuna and Duryodhana who have both gone to him to ask his help, and offers them the choice of himself as a non-combatant and of his ten thousand troops. He gives the first choice to Arjuna whom he had first seen just after waking, and Arjuna chooses Krishna, and this proves the decisive factor in the battle. Now let us imagine that when coming to Dwarka Arjuna meets with a light accident which delays him by an hour. Duryodhana would then be the only person present when Krishna wakes, and being given the choice chooses Krishna himself. The result of the battle is clear. Krishna would never have been a half-hearted helper and the Pandavas would have been wiped out. There would have been no Gita, and it could not be said that Dharma, with its embodiment in Krishna, had conquered. Where then would have been the glory of Krishna ? If he is a really great man, then his real glory obviously does not lie in these two events.

There is another event which might give the clue ; it is the worship offered to Krishna at the Rajsuya Yajna, as the greatest man of his time. In what did his greatness lie ? He had a little time ago returned from the killing of Jarasandha ; but though the idea of duel was his, yet the victory was that of Bhima who fought and killed Jarasandha. There was nothing in it to entitle Krishna to the enthusiastic reverence given to him by Bhishma and others,—the greatest men present. It was not that divinity was shining and apparent in him, at any rate not to Shishupala and his small band of followers ; not to Duryodhana and his large following of Kaurava notables who would not accept Krishna's mediation before the Mahabharata ; not to his relatives, the Yadavas, including his own brother Balarama, who had suspected him of the theft of a diamond, and who later on did not agree to his suggestion to the marriage of Arjuna with Subhadra ; and not to the king of Vidarbha

who would not marry his daughter Rukmini to Krishna. He was not given the worship because he was a great scholar, Vyasa and Yajnavalkya being there ; not a great monarch, being only the scion of a small clan and the king, Ugrasena, his maternal grand-father was there, as were the monarchs Dhritarashtra, Drupada, and the son of Jarasandha ; not the greatest warrior, for veterans like Bhishma, Drona, were also assembled there.

Krishna was great in that quality, which has made others the greatest men of their time,—Christ, Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Mohammed, and even to-day, in a certain line, Mahatma Gandhi—in the quality of searching out truths for themselves, in speaking them out fearlessly, and in living according to them despite consequences. But Krishna far exceeds all of them in the immense width of his range, and in its depth, the others being confined to a far narrower compass.

The two avatars of Rama and Krishna are complementary to each other. Rama shows the ideals which should inspire a man and how they should affect internally his own life. Krishna embodies the same following of truth, but as it affects a man's relation to external things, to his religious, social and political life. Rama tries to bring the kingdom of God in the heart, by following Truth in the form of Satya, and sacrificing all that he holds near and dear for it. Krishna tries to bring the kingdom of God on earth, by following Truth as Dharma, in relation to others, through the qualities mentioned in the Gita for an avatar, (and for everyone else) whatever the consquences.

The incidents in his early life as a boy signify Krishna's efforts to check the growing decadence in Hindu religion and to reform it. Krishna's fight with Indra is the most prominent event in his life at Brindaban. It is a historical fact that in the later Rig-Vedic times, Indra became the prominent Indian god and was fond of drink and meat ; sacrifices were increasing accompanied by immense butchery of animals and heavy drinking bouts. The fight against Indra was clearly against this form of Indra worship, particularly when he substituted the worship of Gobardhan for it (Gobardhan means increase in

cattle, cattle being the chief wealth of the pastoral tribe to which Nanda belonged). All other religous reformers—Christ, Buddha, Mohammed,—repeatedly say that they come to re-establish the old pure religion and to remove the later false accretions. Krishna wishes the same and, in the Gita, says that he reveals the old teaching. The chief point about Rig-Vedic religion was that it was a religion of gladness, of friendliness with gods, where man was helping them with sacrifices and they in return were to give him prosperity. Animistic religions are always religions of fear, of vengeful fierce gods, the bringers of calamities and diseases, and their worship is to placate them. The worship of Gobardhan is the worship of the God of Prosperity, and in it Krishna was probably reviving some old similar feast, something like what is described later at the Raivataka mountain, and possibly also at the last feast of the Yadavas at the sea-side. Krishna fought against Indra, and also against Kaliya, or serpent worship. Both these are clearly allegorical tales and so, obviously, are the destruction of Putana, the vile goddess who is supposed to bringdiseases to babies at the breast ; the various other worships of trees, birds, the wild ass and the bull. They are all shown as demons, and, in killing them, Krishna is trying to destroy the worship of false gods. He also tries to do away with the sacrificial Yajna and organises the Rajsuya Yajna, with the worship of wisdom (in the wisest man), whilst his religious reform culminates with the common-sense teaching of the Gita.

Krishna, in his incessant war with evil, tries to do it with as little bloodshed as possible. He was a son of one of the daughters of Raja Ugrasena who had been deposed by one of his many sons. There was a strong feeling againt Kansa, and to save useless loss of lives in a civil war, or insurrection, Krishna engineered the removal of only the offender. He adopted a similar course in planning the duel between Bhima and Jarasandha, and saved the lives of an immense number of persons in useless warfare. In Mahabharata the quarrel was not over the misdoing of any one person but over the rights of the Pandavas to their former kingdom as against the Kauravas. At an earlier stage, when there was a chance of a quarrel over the exile of the

young Pandavas from Hastinapur, Krishna had intervened and arranged a compromise whereby Pandavas got Khandava-prastha.

The guiding principle of Krishna's life is Truth (Dharma), which must be followed at any cost, even if he has to kill with his hands his own maternal uncle Kansa, or his cousin Shishupala. Truth must stand even if nearest relations have to fight and destroy one another as in the Mahabharata. On himself he was as strict as he was on others. When Duryodhana and Arjuna both ask for help from him he does not, like the more worldly-minded Balarama, tell them to fight it out among themselves. Krishna could not thus shirk his obligations ; he could have disowned them before the war had been decided on, told Kauravas to mend their ways or he would have no connection with them, but he could not now turn away from either. He is not self-centred, to save himself loss and trouble ; nor a partisan, hoping to gain something, directly or otherwise, if his side wins ; he stands to lose whoever wins.*

For himself Krishna wants nothing. He refused the throne when it was offered to him at Kansa's death. He has no false pride ; his friend is ragged Sudama ; he stops with Vidura and prefers to dine with him. When accused of the theft of Syamantaka diamond, he does not kill the traducers, but meekly goes out to search the thief, pursues him, has to kill him, recovers the diamond and restores it to the owner. When Shishupala abuses him in open assembly even up to a hundred times, he hears and bears it all patiently, and it is only when Shishupala, irritated at his immobile calm, calls him a coward and challenges him to a fight, Krishna has to fight and Shishupala is killed. He hears abuses patiently when he goes as an ambassador of peace to Hastinapur palace. For himself he was the meekest and the lowliest.

Rama in order to follow Truth made an entire ruin of his life. Krishna in order to establish Truth brought on ruin not only to his own life, but to the entire Aryan civilisation of the time ; and it is owing to this tremendous sacrifice that Hinduism survives to this day.

* The treacheries ascribed to Krishna in the Mahabharata war are clear interpolations. D N Pal deals with them in his 'Life of Krishna'

Some years later the Yadavas in a drunken orgy by the sea-side quarrelled and killed one another ; Krishna and Balarama were the only two survivors. Balarama dies of snake bite, and Krishna is fatally wounded by mistake by an aborigine. Before dying he sends a message to the women at Dwarka—all the grown up males being killed,—to go with Bajra, his great grandson, a baby, to Hastinapur, as Dwarka would soon be engulfed by the encroaching sea. He then dies.

Before closing let us think on the last thoughts of Krishna, the greatest man of his time, and as fancy paints him, the darling of the Gopis, the consort of sixteen thousand queens, the king of golden Dwarka, and the lord of illimitable wealth, glory and happiness.

Krishna would at this time be about fifty five years of age, (as the Pandavas do not yet go for some years in retirement), and is quite strong in body and in mind. Throughout his life he has tried to follow truth, to help the good, to punish the wicked, and to bring prosperity to men. But somehow in whatever he tried he failed ; his shadow, he feels, has been like to that of the upas tree, withering on whatsoever it fell. He tried to remove the false gods and their worship accompanied by animal sacrifices and drink ; but it continued even in the Ashwamedha Yajna of the Mahabharata, it continued till, later, Buddha stopped much of it, and it continues to-day in some sects of Hinduism. He tried to establish worship in open places, which grew into revelry and drunkenness, and ended in the destruction of his own Yadava tribe by it. Krishna tried so much for the Yadavas, relieved them of Kansa's tyranny, helped them to fight Jarasandha, piloted them safely to Dwarka, refused the crown they offered him after Kansa, and their gratitude was that they suspected him of stealing a diamond. The town of Dwarka itself, which he developed into the proverbial golden Dwarka, is now being eaten up by the sea, to remain but a tradition. He worked his hardest for the Pandavas, was their greatest friend, got them Khandava-prastha, helped in the building of Indra-prastha, (the finest of cities,—even as the city of Indra), went to Magadha to fight Jarasandha for the Rajsuya Yajna, had it performed, and by his efforts made the Pandavas the premier power in India. He goes home, and

they in their folly, in their false notions of pride, gamble away within a few hours all this fine kingdom and become outcastes and wanderers. The Rajsuya Yajna too, where he was acclaimed as the greatest man, was hardly worth it when he had to hear abuses in public and had to kill his cousin for it. Through the Mahabharata he tried to establish among the Aryans the reign of righteousness ; and the result is five old men nursing a baby at Hastinapur, and another baby at Dwarka ; all that fine Aryan civilisation—all destroyed. A malevolent fate seemed to be following and ruining all that he tried ; the Yadavas at Mathura and then at Dwarka ; Dwarka, his own city, itself ; the Pandavas and Kauravas ; the Aryan nation ; he himself, his sons and grand-sons, —yea, even up to the third generation. And his own life,—a total failure from beginning to the end, from his birth in a prison, his childhood deprived of the love and care of his own parents, a youth passed in exile, and the later years in helping in the slaughter of his nearest friends and relatives, to his death, an *Akala Mrityu* (untimely death) being mistaken for a beast by a wild man, with no friend to soothe his last moments and no relative to give him a proper funeral. He dies a complete, miserable failure, the only consolation to him being his own words in the Gita, the summit of his teaching, exhibited to the highest in his own life:—

कर्मन्येवधिकारस्तेमाफलेषुकदाचन ।

(Only on thy own actions hast thou control, but never on their result.)

And Hinduism crowns him as the highest of Avatars, the highest revelation of the Divine yet shown in man ; for the glory of human life lies not in success, but in striving for the unattainable, —the Divine, through pain, trouble and failure. No human being can show such a wide range and depth of continual strivings in all walks of life, and such continual failures, and yet keeping it on, not for self-gain, but simply because it was his Dharma, the duty laid on him.

CHAPTER X

THE VEDAS

The Vedas are said to be the scripture of the Hindus. But unlike other scriptures they are said to be not man-made. They are held to be eternal, the repository of them being the Divine who, at the beginning of each cycle of creation, breathes them forth, as fire emits smoke, and at the end, or Pralaya, withdraws them into Himself, to be re-emitted forth at the next creation. They are the Srutis, the things heard by the ancient Rishis who gave out what they heard. The Mimansa holds the Vedas to be the one eternal verity, uncreated and immortal, and as such Mimansa needs no God. Sankhya says, ईश्वरऽसिद्धेः (God is not proven) but subscribes to the truth and the eternity of the Vedas. A Hindu may believe that God exists, or does not, but if he disbelieves in the Vedas, he is not a Hindu. A Nastika is not an atheist, but a disbeliever in the Vedas, नास्तिकोवेदनिन्दकः। Some hymns of the Vedas have against them the name of some Rishi, but, so it is said, they were not the composers but the seers, who with their mind's eyes saw the verses and wrote them down—they were *mantra drishtah* ; the Vedas are the fountain head of knowledge and truth, and need no proof ; they are the one basis of Hinduism.

The Vedas include the hymns or Samhita of the Rik, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva Vedas ; the Brahmanas, or the explanations of the hymns, the sacrifices and the legends ; the Aranyakas which are the comment on the Brahamanas and go into greater detail about rituals of sacrifices ; and the Upanishads, which are a sort of appendices to the Aranyakas containing philosophical speculations, and are highly revered as the basis of Hindu philosophy.

The Brahmanas which are a commentary on the Samhitas are naturally later than them ; the Aranyakas would be still later ; and the

Upanishads would be comparatively modern, and they also contain some matter openly ascribed to historical persons. The reverence for the divine origin of the Vedas could not therefore be for the commentaries, it must have been for the hymns.

Of the Samhitas, the Atharva Veda is not a real Veda. The other Vedas treat of gods to be loved and worshipped. The Atharva Veda deals largely with fear and superstition, of spirits and ghosts ; with charms and incantations for sickness, enemies, love, hate, for even to grow hair on a bald head, and is probably of a later date. It is also a late inclusion among the Vedas, as formerly it was not called Atharva Veda, but Atharva Angirasa. The Upanishads, the Gita, the Manu-smriti, mention only three Vedas,—Rik, Sama and Yajur :—and up to the Buddhistic period, only these three Vedas are mentioned. The three Vedas were allotted to three different classes of priests for various ceremonies in sacrifices.

The Rig Veda is the repository of the hymns from which the Sama and Yajur Vedas have borrowed for their own uses. The Rig Veda has 10417 verses ; and the Sama Veda has 1549 verses, but all of these except 78 belong to the Rig Veda. So the Sama itself has practically no separate existence. The Yajur Veda has in it hymns, prose passages and explanatory prose pieces and is mainly for the use of the priests to be recited at sacrifices and when making altars, etc. ; most of its hymns come from the Rig Veda.

Thus the only Veda which can claim divine origin can be the Rig Veda. In fact it is said that in the Sat Yuga there was only one Veda नासौसामऋग्यजुर्वर्णाः *a and it was in the Dwapara, not even in the Treta, that the one was divided into four Vedas.*b Rig Veda is divided into ten Mandalas or books, of which the tenth book is admitted to be of a much later date than the other nine. There are besides several *Danstuti*

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*a..The Religions of India, by E W Hopkins p 420

b..एकंएवद्विजावेदोवेदार्थःचैकेवतु— ' एक वेदस्यच अज्ञानातवेदाःतेवहवःकृता (Mahabharata)
(To the wise the Veda is one, its meaning is one, but through ignorance they have made of the one Veda into many)

verses, composed to thank patrons for their gifts, and there are some eleven Valkhilya hymns, all of a later period. There remain thus only a certain number of verses from the nine books of the Rig Veda, which can claim to be divine and eternal, but recent researches give them also differing periods of seniority in time. The Rig Veda contains hymns in praise of various gods, Indra, Varuna, and others, for prosperity, flocks, crops, victory, etc, with descriptions of sacrifices and has nearly an entire book in praise of the Soma drink.

These verses of the Rig Veda should be recipients of the highest honour. Hindu scholars have however divided knowledge into two parts, the lower and the higher ; the lower is held the Karma Kanda, or the above orthodox Vedic hymns concerned with sacrifices, prayers to gods and rituals ; and the higher is the philosophical portion, the Jnana Kanda comprising the Upanishads. Thus the later, the clearly manmade, is held the higher knowledge, whilst the ancient, which alone can claim to be eternal knowledge, is said to be the lower. The Upanishads, which themselves form a part of the Vedas, deride the parent Vedas ; Gita has not much respect for the Vedas ; the Mahabharata (XII-329-6) says "Deceitful are the Vedas". Other eminent scholars also have the same view, holding the Upanishads in the highest honour ; whenever Vyasa, Patanjali, Gautama, Kapila want to quote authority they mention the Srutis, and mean thereby the Upanishads, giving reference to its verses. Thus the holiness of the Vedas must be ascribed to the Upanishads and not to the ancient Vedas themselves.

But, curiously, when Sankhya and Mimansa, Jainism and Buddhism, deny the existence of God they are not taken to task ; but when the two latter deny the eternity of the Vedas they are held as Nastiks, heretical. Sankhya and Mimansa are within the Hindu fold, but Buddhism and Jainism are not though they originally started as one of the Hindu sects. But Hinduism itself holds the Vedas as of low state. So, clearly, the word Veda does not refer to the four Vedas which are lower, and cannot also refer to the Upanishads which are man-made. The solution is that when Buddhists and Jains, the followers of Buddha and Mahavira, say that whatever was said by their founders was the

final truth and cannot be wrong and no addition and alteration can be made to it, Hinduism is up in arms, it says that as it is wrong to say that all light on this globe comes from one orb alone, so no one can say that one teacher has the final truth. The Hindu Upanishads, the highest of Hindu thought, are themselves vague guesses at truth, often conflicting in their views. a The word Veda comes from Vid, to know, hence Veda is knowledge, which is eternal and will continue for ever. b A man may believe in God or not,—that is only his theory which is incapable of direct proof,—but when he says that he alone has the final truth, he attacks the Veda, which is as elusive and as pervasive as space. Clear, growing, pure knowledge, having behind it the sanction of reason, is Veda.

But Hinduism is not content with saying that Veda is eternal, it also says that Rik, Sama, Yajur Vedas are immortal. Sama Veda is for singing and has both metre and chant; the Richas are metrical but they can not be sung, they are something like the Psalms of the old Testament meant for recitation; the Yajus are the prose pieces meant to be slowly spoken, and have no chant or metre. *c The terms Sama, Rik and Yajus do not mean these three books, which cannot be eternal, but the three methods of expression. Just as the inconceivable Divine can be perceived by human beings only through its three functions of creation preservation and destruction, so can illimitable divine knowledge be expressed in humanity only through poetry, semi-song recitation, and prose. Hinduism allegorises that the unity of the Vedas can be expressed only by the triune action of Rik, Sama and Yajus.

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a.. Buddha himself was a Hindu and his disciples were all Hindus Even up to the time of Asoka Buddhism was a branch of Hinduism It was several centuries later when Buddhist priests made of Buddha a god and declared his writings as final revelation that it was treated as Nastik and out of the Hindu fold

b.. Tilak in his 'The Arctic Home in the Vedas", (pp, 452 & 458) holds that the Vedas were compiled from old oral traditions which existed among ancient Aryans The contents and sense were ancient, traditional and beginningless, whilst the expression, language and form were modern and human. Their beginning is lost in geological antiquity, and the Vedas may well be said to be beginningless. He refers to Patanjali on his gloss on Panini (IV 3-101) who distinguishes between the contents and sequence of words, ***artho nityah*** (the sense is eternal), ***varnan apurvi anitya*** (the order of the letters and words is not eternal) The Mimansakas however hold that both the sense and the order of the words are eternal

**c* "The characteristic element of the Yajur Veda is its prose formulae, the Yajus, which are in prose, and this is the oldest prose literature of the Indo-European peoples" (Goldstucker, quoted in Hindu Mythology by Wilkins, p 4)

The basis of Hinduism is in its Vedas—that which does not conform to true clear knowledge is not to be accepted, mere authority as such is to be repudiated, Vedas have changed and will continue changing with each growth in knowledge, but the basis must always be the same. Hinduism is here again striking on the same golden chord that resounds through all its philosophy, that the only way to realise the Divine is through knowledge and the only shape in which human mind can conceive of Him is as Pure Knowledge, as **वेदस्वरूप** (having the form of the Veda) and this is the one eternal Reality behind all creation.

CHAPTER XI

THE GAYATRI

The Gayatri has been called the essence of the Vedas; writers have been extravagant in its praise. The Skanda Purana says "Nothing in the Vedas is superior to Gayatri........The Gayatri is the mother of the Vedas". It is considered to be the highest mantra for the Hindus. But there is nothing at all remarkable about it. The Rig Veda has ten books and each of its books has hundreds of hymns and each of the hymns has several verses; the total number of verses is over ten thousand. Out of these, one verse, to be exact, the tenth verse in the sixty-second hymn of the third book, is the Gayatri. The hymn itself is nothing remarkable, it is not distinguished or honoured for anything else, e.g. the Purusha Sukta etc. for their philosophy, the hymns to the dawn for their beauty; this hymn is just only an ordinary prayer-hymn to various gods, Indra and others, for benefits. It is as if a couple of ordinary lines out of one of the minor plays of Shakespeare had been taken and called the greatest verse not only in all his works but in all the literature of the world. The meaning of the Gayatri is very simple, and because it is so simple, with no apparent greatness in it, that translators have added to the meaning, transformed and dilated on it, so that out of numerous translations hardly any two give the same meaning in all details and the mind gets bewildered in trying to guess what it really means. Gayatri has been magnified into magic, so that the mere utterance of the words gives marvellous results.

But there must have been something in it which made the learned Rishis of old to select this one verse which of itself has no philosophical teaching or theory what-so-ever as the very best of the thousands of verses in the Vedas, and for it to have retained this pre-eminence by common consent among Hindu scholars for over two

thousand years, who accepted it as the highest prayer that a human being can lay before the Divine. Each religion has its prayers according to its ideals; the Gayatri must therefore be in some way embodying the highest ideals of Hinduism,—its loftiest concept of the Divine and the highest boon it can ask.

The word Gayatri in itself has no significance, being the name of an ordinary three-verse metre in which this and a very large number of other hymns in the Rig Veda are composed. (*Ga*-song, *tri*-three, or the verse of three metres). The prayer is to Savituh (or Savitri) the name of the sun just before its rising.

The meaning of the Gayatri is :—OM,-The Divine ; *Bhu, Bhuvah Svah,* earth, sky, the heavens. These words are not a part of the real verse, but are only an introductory direction to attune the mind by meditating on the Divine who pervades the universe.

Tat,—That,—*Savitur,*—the sun at its rising, the Energiser, *Varenyam,* adorable,—*Bhargo,*—glory, *Devasya* of the god,—*Dhimahi,*—we meditate,—*Dhiyah,* the intelligence, (the word Buddhi is from the same root),—*Yah,* who,—*Noh,*—of us,—*Prachodyat,* stimulate.

(We meditate on the adorable glory of the Energiser, may He stimulate our intelligence.)

This is all. The sun at dawn is compared to the fountain of energy, which will grow into the full sun at noon, and life grows by it. The prayer is to that fountain of energy from which all creation springs and which pervades and supports all creation and is the highest concept of the Divine in Hinduism. And what are we to ask of Him. Not health, or wealth, or power, not even happiness or peace of mind, for these are all material, physical, or mental things which we can by our own efforts attain. Moreover asking for such gains breeds a sense of egoism as well. In Hinduism the Divine has been held to have the form of pure intelligence ; it is growth of intelligence towards which evolution is moving ; and it is intelligence alone which raises a man above

beasts and also elevates one nation or person above another in the scale of civilisation. So what higher thing can we ask of Him than to illumine in us more and more that part in us which brings us in nearer approach to Him. If we get that which brings us closer to the Divine the rest we can carve out for ourselves. It is a prayer of self-reliance, not a begging of personal favours, nor a grovelling for forgiveness and remissions of sins. a*

This prayer for getting more intelligence is repeated over and over again, as the very highest in Hinduism. In the Rig Veda it is वर्चोमेदेहि (Give me light); in the Upanishads तमसोमाज्योतिर्गमय (From darkness lead me to light) In Gita the direction is (II-50) बुद्धौशरणमन्विच्छ (Seek thy refuge under Buddhi.) In Svet. Upan. (VI-8) the Divine is addressed as देवमात्मबुद्धि प्रकाशम (the Divine illuminer of intelligence in the soul) and in III-4 and also in IV-1 is the prayer सनोबुद्ध्याशुभयासंयुनक्तु (May He unite us to pure Buddhi).

When He himself is Supreme Intelligence, what lesser thing can we ask than that He should illumine Himself in us more and more.

The pre-eminence of the Gayatri lies in this that in the simplest of words it approaches the Divine in His highest aspect as the Productive Power and prays for intelligence for productivity, the greatest boon a man can ask for.

*a..G L Dickinson, in his 'Religion and Immortality' Ch I says that we are all learning that not power but order is the essence of the world, not caprice but reason is the attribute of the Divine, that we ourselves can work out our own salvation without expecting or desiring supernatural intervention.

CHAPTER XII

OM

OM is said by the Hindus to be the highest name of the Divine; it has been called the mystic word of the Hindus, the word of Power. To concentrate on it is said to take the mind nearest possible to the Highest. Every Hindu praises it; learned meanings have been found in the trilogy, अ उ म, the three letters which compose it, so far that any three connected ideas might be said to be represented by them. In the vast luxuriance of interpretations the mind gets lost to find the real significance of the word.

The Hindus were a logical people, the names they gave to their gods denoted the qualities of the gods,—*e.g.* *Vishnu* from *Vish*, to pervade; *Kali*, from *Kal*, death; *Ganesh*, the lord of Ganas; *Siva*, the pure, and so on. But what name could they give to that which is the very basis of all, the very root of the root, and which words cannot express. The Hindu conception of the Divine is that Power which pervades the world as its life-spirit, and yet is itself the material body as well, both the life and body of this multifarious world.

No names can express Him, for all names represent finite ideas. All existing names express only a part of His idea and not the whole. He is One, but is also the innumerable, and yet admits of no second. Call Him Brahman, but it postulates a Jiva. Call him Para-Brahman, Purushottam, but you imply a lower Brahman and Purusha. Ishwara needs Maya, his creation; call him merely by his qualities, Swayambhu, Siva, Akshara, Good, but He is each of these, all of these and very much more. The qualities also need a subject,

[1]. The entire Mandyuka Upanishad is on the OM, as are the two heavy volumes of the 'Pranava Vada' by B Bhagvan Dass Almost every religious work eulogises on 'the greatness of Om and tries to explain it, each with a different interpretation

and again they imply a negative,—the created, the impure, the destructible, the bad,—apart from Him; but He is the negative as well. The names of God in other religions are arbitrary, and different sets of qualities are allotted to them. God may mean an old man sitting above the clouds; or a Being who would not injure an ant; or one who delights in bloodshed; it may mean a merciful or a vengeful God; or a God loving and holding all his creation equally, or biassed and only to be approached through his favourites. The Hindus wanted a name correct, definite and constant,—as an equilateral triangle, or one mile.

We cannot name Him by a number as 786 (used by Mohammedans to denote their number of God's names), for why should not He be 785 or 787. Neither can He be 2,3, or 4, for take away from them the idea of one-ness and they all vanish, for 2 is only 1 plus 1. Think of Him as 1,get absorbed in Him, then the multiplicity of the world, through which alone we see Him, is disregarded.

He cannot be denoted by any consonant, for a क wants a ख etc, nor by any vowel, for अ is equal with इ or उ. Sanskrit alphabet is made up of vowels अ इ उ ए ओ अँ and the consonants signified by क ख ट त प etc. Sanskrit has not only the most phonetic, but the most scientific alphabet devised so far. In Sanskrit every consonant presupposes a vowel for क=क्+अ, so that the Brahman of the vowels pervades all the consonants, and any name of God made of purely any consonant would be impossible for a vowel would always be present in it. A name of God of One vowel only would not suffice, for the rest would be excluded; so the name should contain all the vowels. The vowels have two forms, long and short, the long is only the prolongation दीर्घ of the short, so the basis is the short. The vowels अ इ etc. represent sounds made from the different parts of the mouth,—the lips, throat, etc.

The ancient Aryan, in devising a name of God, concluded that as vowels are the basis of all words and of speech, so His name should be all the vowels अ इ उ ए ओ अँ.* Pronounce them in a continuation and you pronounce OM.

*..Just as the Divine has been called उहिएव सर्वे देवा (Bri Upan I IV 6) (for He is all gods)

The framers made their intention clear that the name is only a sound, and not any definite word, by not giving any fixed letters or sounds for it, and it is for this reason that OM is written in so many ways अउम्—ओं-ओम्-ऊँ-उं. It is an attempt to write down what was really a sound taught directly to the disciple by speech, as a whistle or a clap of hands.

The greatness of the meaning of OM is that it is as near a complete name of the Divine as possible. It is the basis of all speech, for speech is impossible without a part of OM. OM pervades all words, and all words have sprung from OM. Consonants have their separate existence but are nothing without OM, yet OM is apart from them ; and just as the utility of the vowel can only be seen through their play in the consonants, so song and speech find their beauty and colour through OM.

OM thus expresses, so far as is humanly possible, the idea that everything that exists is pervaded by the Divine and of the dependance of creation on Him. No other example can illustrate so well how He is the life as well as the body of creation, how nothing can exist without Him, how He is apart, and yet how to see His beauty we have to look into His creation—for not otherwise can He be seen. He is in all, and all is in Him, and yet He is apart from all. We have our own different beings, have our free wills, and yet are nothing without Him.

CHAPTER XIII

SWASTIKA

The emblem of Swastika is used in Hindu homes as an emblem of good luck. It is said to be an ancient Aryan symbol of the worship of the Sun, but is far previous to the Aryan advent in India. The Chinese also have been revering this symbol from ancient times ; their Red Cross Society is named the Red Swastika Society. It has been found in old Egyptian graves. It was also found in the ruins of Peru and must have been carried there as a part of common culture when America was linked with Asia in pre-historic times. What its meaning could be has never been clearly found, and any attempt to elucidate it can only be a very distant guess.

The usual sign of the Swastika is based on what is known as a Greek cross, as (A) with the sides bent at right angles. There are two other forms, one with the sides curved outwards, as (B) which is in effect the same as the first figure, or with the cross contained inside a circle, as (C) .

It is generally held that the Swastika is an Aryan sign and is believed to be the bringer of good luck. The highest bringer of good luck can only be our highest conception of the Divine. Hinduism is the premier branch of ancient Aryanism, and their highest conception of the Divine is that Power which is manifested in the world and is yet beyond it, (as distinct from the other theories which say that God is a separate entity apart from the world). This concept of Hinduism is derived from the Vedas, but it must also have been a heritage in some form which they brought over from their ancient northern homes. It could not

evidently be a new discovery by the writers of the Vedas (which are in themselves relics of ancient traditions), but was very probably developed in Hindu philosophy from germs of ancient thought. Human religion cannot be a totally new plantation, but, being concerned with beliefs held in living human hearts can only be a pruning of the non-essentials and a growth on the old roots. Swastika should then represent the germ of the Aryan idea of the highest Divine.

The basis of the Swastika is a cross ; but it is not exactly the cross of Christ, as it should otherwise have one end elongated as †. Thus it is not the Christian and cross all that it signifies. The cross however represents another idea, as pointing to the four corners of the compass. By putting N. S. E. or W. on any one side, it would mean that that particular direction was indicated. The cross without any letter would mean all the four directions. A symbol to denote the Master of the whole world, who pervades the world in all its directions, as is expressed in the Gita (XI-20) व्याप्तंत्वयैकेनदिशश्चसर्वाः (Pervaded by Thee alone are all the directions), would be the cross surrounded on all sides as ⊕ or ⊞, but these symbols make God conterminous with the world; but He escapes the limitations and is infinitely more. So if we cut off the surrounding lines a little then the idea becomes as enclosing the world and yet breaking through and going beyond it, as 卐 or 卍.

The Swastika is the form, whilst Om is the name (but much later as written language is much later than sign language) of the conception of the Divine as held by the Aryans. The two complement each other ; the written ॐ conveys no significance unless pronounced, whilst Swastika does not need the name, but is only the symbol.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

Hinduism is steadily falling down. Hindus are growing weak in body, wanting in character, low in political stature and devoid of great purposes. Hinduism clearly says that the one thing we carry with us after death is character, and that is the one thing, the chief wealth for man, in which Hindus are said to be weakest.

The cause is that they raised the lower to the rank of the higher and remained content with the lower. All gods are conceptions of the Divine, but though a full concept of Him can never be reached by the human mind yet all concepts are not equal. Hinduism has been worshipping its gods, calling each the highest of gods, and they might be so for that particular purpose, yet all of them are decidedly not equal. The weakness of Hinduism has been that in temporarily raising the lower it did not affirm and re-affirm that the highest is above all these. Gita is full of these assertions ; Krishna repeatedly says that the highest is Another and continually advises the worship of the highest. The Muslims worship the tombs of the saints, the Kaaba Stone, the Pirs and the prophets, but there is always repeated the Kalma, *La ilah il Allah*,—There is no God but Allah. The Christian worships his numerous saints, the various Madonnas at different places, yet everywhere is held aloft the Cross, the figure of tortured Christ, as the highest ideal. The Hindu worships the numerous gods, but there is no constant overt affirmation that the highest is Another.

The lower must always be held as subordinate to the higher and above them all must be affirmed definitely and clearly the highest. As man advances, the lower is slowly eliminated, so gods with low ideals are slowly to be put aside. In the Deccan, Shankara suppressed the

unclean worship of Siva as a dog, under the name of Mallar, and of the Kappalikas, whose god desired human sacrifices. a The cult of Kali as expressed in Thugi and Vamachari have been suppressed. Krishna himself opposed the worship of Indra and the lower gods. All gods are decidedly not equal.

No man or nation can rise above the concept of its gods. *b If the concept is low then the ideal is degraded and the worshipper is degraded. An old writer says "Show me your gods and I will show you your men." It is true यथादेवा तथाभक्ता (The worshippers are as their gods.) श्रद्धामयोऽयंपुरुषः (Gita XVII. 3) (A man is according to his ideals.) We see gods according to our ideals.

जिनकी रही भावना जैसी। हरि मूरत देखी तिन तैसी॥

(Rama was seen by people in such shape as were their own natures.)

A worshipper of a low god is decidedly better than one who worships no gods, has no external ideal except his own glory and gain, but he himself is just as decidedly lower than the follower of a higher ideal; the imperfect must be realised as the imperfect and the perfect must constantly be affirmed as the highest. This constant affirmation gives a goal to be steadily striven for and continuously inspires the mind. The disaster comes when we stop growing, being content with what we have, for then the lower slowly swamps the higher, the weeds and jungle kill out the flowers and fruit trees. The ideal must be clear and definite, not nebulous and contradictory, for indefiniteness of the ideal leads to wastage of effort and hinders progress.

The highest would never be reached in this life, but there is no excuse for not going on as far as possible. In geometry we will never be able to draw a line without breadth, but we can draw a line the best we can. In actual life too pure water and air as defined by science are unobtainable, but that does not force us to die of thirst and without

*a..S Radha Krishnan, Indian Philosophy Vol II p 450

*b.."The gods we stand by are the gods we need and can [illegible] gods whose demand on us are inforcements of our demands on our selves and on one another [illegible])

breathing. Swami Rama Krishna says, "All kinds of water are brooded over by Narayana but every kind of water is not fit for drink". Means should be recognised as means but are not the end ; but to regard them as the end itself is to keep life in shallows ; both are necessary but for their different purposes.

History of all religions and sects shows that the purer the religion the farther has the individual or nation advanced. Religion is concerned with the beliefs in the mind of a man which express themselves in all the activities of his life, but if it is directed merely to pandering to the material objects and senses, it loses its full purpose.. Giving alms to priests, reciting a mantra a crore of times, visiting holy spots, making temples, repeating by heart even all the Vedas leave a sense of vacuity after the performance. Similarly the ecstasy of song and dance in worship, after it is over leaves a sense of exhaustion. The pleasure we hoped to get by trying to reach the Divine by them does not materialise after we have accomplished them. The happiness of the heart is not in the attainment of the object, but in the continual striving forward for it, in trying to reach the unattainable. Alexander sighs for other worlds to conquer ; the eternal quest for the Holy Grail produces a Sir Galahead. In trying to reach the highest through elevating the mind, in trying to be truthful, pure, courageous and helpful to others, we are embarking on a quest we shall never be able to attain, there will always remain heights of endeavour beyond. All prayers, incantations, daily gifts of charity become mechanical by repetition, the pleasure obtained by listening to a song is decreased by further repititions, but every time we speak the truth when put to the strain, remain pure when temptations assail, help others at personal self-sacrifice, each such act strengthens our moral fibre and makes strong the character. Material worship and emotional worship are both really for self-gain, but speaking truth, remaining pure, courage, service, take us out of ourselves in relation to others. The one as the sea tries to absorb all to itself and becomes briny; the other as the mountain stream in giving of itself, flowing through rocks and pebbles, remains fresh and pure.

The aim of life is decidedly not the search of salvation and to be

constantly hankering after it, but to help forward the Divine plan, to be a coworker with Him. Just as real pleasure is never found by material possessions and sense-pleasures, but is the result of duty properly performed—by the Master within the heart saying 'Well-done' —so does salvation not come by directly striving for it but by forgetting one's self in His work, and then through His grace it comes. To gain salvation for one's self is a very low ideal,—Harishchandra would not enter Swarga until his Chandala master accompanied him, Yudhishtra would not go without his dog, Rama carried all the residents of Ajodhya with him, and Buddha would not enter Nirvana until all the world gets its salvation. By making yourself busy with His work, forgetting yourself in it, you will not need salvation,—for you will have obtained it.

The chief direction for life in Hinduism is to follow Dharma. Dharma has been given many and confusing interpretations. The essence of Dharma is the following of Truth. **नास्तिसत्यपरोधर्मः** (There is no Dharma higher than truth.) Follow truth in thought, in word and in deed. The highest men in Hinduism, Rama and Krishna, obtained their divine status because they followed truth, as they saw it, at any cost, and with no pretexts, excuses or exceptions. This is the root of Dharma, clear direction post for every one.

Hinduism frankly says that the Ultimate Reality is unattainable by human intellect. But with this reservation, it provides a designation of the Divine and direction for the guidance of human life as near perfect as is humanly possible. In the terms of OM and Swastika it gives a name and form for that Power which pervades, sustains and directs creation. In its concepts of Siva, Vishnu and other gods it gives various concepts of divinity in His relation with humanity, to be worshipped as might be best suited to various temperaments and intellects. The examples of the ideal men, Rama and Krishna, impart the injunction of having a very high ideal for the conduct of our own lives, and of unwavering righteousness in our dealings with others and also that

*..This is the definition of Agnostics as well, who say that God is unknown and unknowable (Murray's New English Dictionary)

under all conditions should life be lived with a disregard of self for the active good of others. Hinduism bases itself on reasoned knowledge—the Vedas—and not on mere assertive authority, whilst the prayer, the effort of life, should be to keep more and more bright and productive our intelligence, the god-like part within us. It says that creation has been evolving from the unintelligent to the intelligent, and civilisation has been growing from mutual destruction to fraternal co-operation. The next step to be striven for is the growth of truth and righteousness in our daily lives, so that in course of time they shall become as a part of our inborn nature ; and thus shall we be irradiating, although unconsciously, the Divine in our life and humbly moulding the world to His will.

Truth is said to be hidden as in a well ; it is **गूढ़नुप्रविष्टम** (hidden in the deep). When self-interest, blind tradition and custom are at stake plausible excuses are easliy found ; there are contradictory, and many, teachers, and among them to find the truth is no easy task. The highest quest in life should be to find truth amid the glittering shadows of the world, and this is embodied in a verse (of the Isha Upanishad,) about which Tagore says, "which in the depth of its simplicity carries the lyrical silence of the wide earth gazing at the morning sun". [a]

हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम्—तत्त्वं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये

(The golden veil of world's glitter has obscured the face of Truth, remove that Thou, O! Nourisher, to enable us to perceive the true Dharma.) [b]

To follow truth should be the aim of life, and to spread the reign of Dharma the goal for all Hindus, so that by our efforts we might one day, it may be even in our own lives, begin to get a fleeting gleam of the advent of Sat Yuga. To spread this faith, and to work for it should be the purpose of life,—to live for it and to spend our lives for it.

But Dharma is the expression of truth in our relations with men ; it cannot come divorced from the world ; it is to recognise divinity in

*a.. Personality by R N Tagore *b.. Author's translation

man, to see God all around us and to realise Him thus. To Radha (the worshipper) her beloved Krishna is not in Mathura or elsewhere, every moment he is all around her and she sees him wherever she looks. To work for the welfare of the world is to work for Him. In the words of the courageous, clear-sighted, unknown author of the Isha Upanishad, who dares to place the worship of creation on a level with the worship of the Divine:—

ओं—क्रतोस्मर कृतंस्मर क्रतोस्मर. कृतंस्मर

(Om ! Remember the Creator, remember the created ; remember the Creator, remember the created.)*

* Author's translation,

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